From the Past to the Present

by Izaioi

Summary

Kokichi was selected for the new season of Danganronpa along with other fourteen people. It was an occasion to start over. He woke up in a classroom full of weeds and strange objects. But he woke up on a beach in a sunny day, too. What is true and what is a lie? Why are his memories disconnected from reality? What is reality, anyway?

(The format is a little experimental for me, please read the first two chapters to understand, I don't want to ruin the surprise in the summary!)

Notes

Hello and welcome!
First I just want to point out that I'm Italian and my English will not be perfect but I'm doing my best. It should be at least decent.
About warnings: don't worry, I've put the "chose not use" because I don't want you to immediately assume if Kokichi is going to live or die, there is no controversial content, I mean if you have played the game there won't be anything worse.

As I said in the summary, this is a bit experimental. I like to play some little mind game, to see if you can guess what's going on exactly, that's why I don't like to put too many tags in my works or to do revealing summaries. It's nothing transcendental, I'm pretty sure you can venture a guess after the first two chapters, so don't take this too seriously :')

If you want to play this little game with me, please read always two chapters in one go. One from Present Side and one from Past Side. They have matching subtitles so you can't get them wrong.

I'll post two chapters every other day, to help you with the correct pacing.

Enjoy!
Present Side

A Supreme Leader

Kokichi woke up with his head rested on a desk inside a classroom.

A little further back another person, with white hair, was sleeping in a similar way. Kokichi got up quickly but silently, surveying his surroundings.

‘Where am I?’

His eyes fell on what he was wearing. A white straight jacket, white pants and a checkered scarf. His clothes seemed very peculiar to him, but another part of his brain confirmed a sense of familiarity. He decided to leave the contradiction for later.

The classroom was strange, it looked old, covered in greenery and weeds and the windows were closed with barbed wire. A giant monitor was attached to the blackboard wall, or rather the green board wall. All around the monitor were speakers.

Kokichi had never seen a place like this before.

‘This place looks everything besides normal. Why am I even here? Have I been... kidnapped?’

The other guy woke up with a groan. Kokichi stood perfectly still while the other was surveying the classroom just like he did. The guy’s eyes fell on him.

“Hello there. Who are you? Do you know where we are?” he greeted him.

For the first time, Kokichi observed the guy fully. He was… odd, metallic.

“Are you a robot?” the words were out of his mouth almost involuntarily.

“Yes, in fact, I’m K1-B0, but you can call me Kiibo. I’m the Ultimate Robot.” he puffed his chest.

“Well, I am the Ultimate Supreme Leader, Ouma Kokichi!” he introduced himself with a big smile. "You should definitely bow to me, as I possess an evil secret organization that has more than 10,000 members!"

“R-really?” the Robot's eyes were wide.

“Nope.”

“W-what?!”

Kokichi heard footsteps outside the door. He quickly considered his possibilities and decide to use the most effective method to make himself easy to underestimate. He prepared himself to put up a little show.

“Wow, you’re so cool! Let me touch your body a little!” he yelled suddenly, launching himself toward the Robot.

He ran away with a yelp and Kokichi took his time chasing him and examining the newcomers at the
same time. One was a girl with a confident smile, the other a guy with a hat that hid the top half of his face. Kokichi decided to spin his lies once again. It was a pretty incredible personality test, after all. The reaction to a lie could tell you a lot about someone.

“It’s a lie, ’cause I’m a liar.” he said with a grin.

The test was a huge success. He could see the exact moment the girl’s eyes, Akamatsu Kaede, filled with distrust. She would not believe a word out of his mouth ever again. Which meant that he could not trust her in turn.

The guy, Saihara Shuichi, was a bit less hopeless. He at least considered his words, sure, since they were lies it kinda made him look stupid but it was still a step in the right direction.

The Robot was the one that confused him the most. What kind of person creates a robot with an AI that makes it saying stuff like ‘I’m a normal high school student’. It made sense that someone would steal him to study his technology, which looked really advanced, but that had nothing to do with him and the others two. The most logical conclusion was that someone was after the Ultimate.

As soon as the two decided to leave to explore the suspicious building they woke up into, Kokichi abandoned the Robot and started exploring on his own. The layout of the school was actually quite complicated. Right outside the classroom there were stairs leading to the basement. Kokichi decided to try to find a way out first. He didn’t had much hope to escape so easily since clearly someone went out of his way to kidnap people, but it was still worth a try. He reached a door with the label “South” on it. A creepy guy with a black mask and long hair was standing nearby. The guy was observing him with great interest but Kokichi didn’t want to talk to him so he ignored him entirely.

The outside was… not what he was expecting. A cage? Where the hell were they? How could a cage like this go unnoticed? The surroundings were covered in greenery once again, everything looked like a mess. Kokichi followed the path until he was in front of a strange shrine with a red door. A girl in a bikini called up to him.

“Hey there! Are you lost?” she was waving her arm and smiling completely at ease.

‘Why, you are not?’

“I’m Yonaga Angie, the Ultimate Artist, if you’re lost you can pray Atua with me---“

Kokichi stopped paying attention at the word ‘pray’. He turned around and made his way back toward the building. On the way he met two people that were talking to each other, one was a guy with a goatee and a purple jacket, the other was a big and muscular guy without shoes.

“Gonta is Ultimate Entomologist, but Gonta can’t find any bug around here. Gonta wonders why…” said the big one talking about himself in third person.

“Don’t worry man, once we are out of here you can find as many bugs as you want! We gotta work together to find a way out! Oh, a new person!” he noticed him observing them. “I’m Momota Kaito, Luminary of the Stars! And you are?” he smiled and put his fists together.

‘No bugs? Despite all this greenery?’

“I’m Ouma Kokichi! As the Supreme Leader of evil, I could order you to build a spaceship that could make me escape, only me obviously, but you don’t look reliable Momota-chan so I’ll refrain!” Kokichi spouted some random nonsense. Like building a spaceship was even a thing in the first place.
“Wha?! Say that to my face!” Momota-chan shouted at him.

‘I just did, you moron.’

“Is there some problem here?” A girl in a maid outfit joined them.

“Ohh, you look useful! Found any way out yet?” Kokichi asked her.

“I’m Toujo Kirumi, the Ultimate Maid, and no, I haven’t, I’m sorry.” she bowed her head a little. "I was checking the dormitory, apparently there is a room for each of us, 16 rooms in total.” she said in a calm and refined manner.

‘Not only we are in a cage, there is also a room for each of us? Do they want something from us? An expert on stars, an entomologist, an artist… this is too random, I can’t imagine a project that would involve all of us. But were we kidnapped for money or revenge they would just lock us into a room. This is very strange.’

“I’m Ouma Kokichi, Ultimate Supreme Leader, I would ask you to join my secret organization, Toujo-chan, but I guess this is not the best time for that! Well, I’ll be on my merry way!”

Putting his hands behind his head to pretend a carefree attitude he quickly left them behind. His distrustful nature made him sneak a peek inside the dormitory to confirm the information for himself. She was telling the truth. Kokichi was not surprised, Toujo-chan was clearly not the type to tell a lie that would get uncovered so easily.

Once again inside the building, Kokichi didn’t want to call it school, he found himself observed by that creepy guy, again.

‘This one looks like a predator, he is waiting at the door because he knows that people will pass through here.’

Kokichi walked past him ignoring him once again and he still didn’t comment on it. They both knew that they had the other figured out. In the corridor, near the bathrooms, he almost bumped into an intimidating looking girl. Her stare was very intense, emanating danger, but she seemed to catch what she was transmitting him and quickly looked away, then she just left. He wasn’t particularly interested in an exchange of greetings with her so he didn’t stop her. Stairs were in front of him.

Kokichi decided to take a look at the upper floor where he met a plain looking girl that was staring at nothing. He ignored her for the moment and searched the rest of the floor. A closed music room and two classrooms that looked just like the one he woke up into. Nothing special really. He returned in front of the girl. He stared at her while she was staring at nothing. After 3 minutes of complete silence, she finally moved.

“My favorite episode of Doraemon is 53 and yours?” she pointed a finger at him.

“I would say the 52.”

The words were in his mouth without any warning. He didn’t even know what was in episode 52 of Doraemon, he stopped watching it really early, he didn’t make it to 20.

“I see! I’m Shirogane Tsumugi, the Ultimate Cosplayer.” she introduced herself.

“Ouma Kokichi, Ultimate Supreme Leader.” He didn’t feel like adding anything else. This whole introduction stuff was getting old fast.
He descended the stairs and returned near the bathrooms, this time he took a turn to the right and was greeted by a blond guy with a chill attitude.

“Hello there! I’m Amami Rantaro,” the guy greeted him with a little wave.

“Cool name, do you know that in Italian Amami means ‘love me’? Very cool.”

Amami-chan chuckled a little.

“You’re an interesting person, aren’t you? Thanks, you are the only one that tried to cheer me up.”

“Cheer you up?”

“I don’t remember my Ultimate talent.”

“I see, well maybe---“

-DING DONG-

-Please assemble at the gym!-

“We better go, hm?”

“Yeah…”
“Are you alright, there? Can you hear me?”

Kokichi woke up on a beach, laying on his back. Above him, looking at him with a concerned expression, was a guy with white hair and a green jacket. He sat up.

‘Where am I?’

His eyes fell on his clothes. It was his normal outfit, white capri pants, purple shoes and purple hoodie. Nothing out of the ordinary there. He pulled up his hood and got up. He was on a beach. On a beach. Kokichi didn’t even like beaches that much, he hated stripping down into a swimsuit. He was kind of uncomfortable without a shirt on.

‘Why am I here?’

The guy was observing him with a faint hint of concern. He was taller than him, not surprising really since he was a little runt, and he looked a little shabby. His hair was a real mess.

“Who are you?” Kokichi asked him.

“I’m Komaeda Nagito, nice to meet you!” his face opened in a smile.

“Ouma Kokichi but you can call me Leader. I’m the Ultimate Supreme Leader, after all. Where are we? How did I end up here?” he asked taking another look around.

“An Ultimate Supreme Leader! Now, this is a cool talent! I’m just the Ultimate Lucky Student, nothing so special. I can’t answer your questions unfortunately, I have no idea myself but, apparently, there are other Ultimates here, I met a couple of them while exploring. Maybe they know something more than me.”

Kokichi followed Nagito out of the beach and into a path. They reached an airport, inside were two guys, one with pink hair and pointed teeth, the other with bandages on his left arm and a purple scarf. Nagito already knew them and made the introductions.

“This one is Soda Kazuichi, he is the Ultimate Mechanic, the other one is Tanaka Gundham, the Ultimate Breeder.”

“Hello, Ouma Kokichi, let’s use the short version and say I’m a Leader, okay?” he wrapped his introduction quickly. “Do you know where we are, why are we here? Can we take a plane? I kinda have things to do…”

“Man, I would be happy to know too! I woke up and I was here, like, right here! Why would I sleep inside an airport?!” the Ultimate Mechanic scratched his head confused. ”And no, no plane. They are… for show, I guess?”
“For show?” Kokichi was filled with disbelief.

“Yeah! Like, they don’t have an engine! Isn’t that crazy?!” Kazuichi chuckled a little, like he had just said a funny joke.

‘Definitely weird.’

Kokichi turned to look at the other guy, the Breeder.

“Hello, anything to add?” he tried.

“You fiend, you better not get too close to me as I’m the Supreme Overlord of Ice and I could destroy you and use your corpse as a foundation for my Tanaka Empire. You, a Leader? How pitiful.” as he was speaking four hamsters come out of his scarf.

‘Well, here is an interesting guy.’

“I see, we shall talk about the foundation of the Tanaka Empire later, you’ll excuse me, oh Supreme Overlord of Ice, but I have other matter to attend to.” Kokichi smiled at him, Gundham didn’t look very appreciative, but at least he was pacified.

‘So… We woke up, we don’t remember how we got here and the airplanes don’t have an engine. Looks legit. Like, legit kidnapping by some crazy people.’

Next, he and Nagito went into a supermarket. Inside were two girls, one with a white apron and several bandages, the other with multicolor hair and a loud personality.

“Yo, there! I’m Mioda Ibuki and I’m the Ultimate Musician and you girl?”

“I-I’m Tsumiki Mikan, I-I’m the U-Ultimate Nurse…”

“C’mon girl! Your voice is so super soft that I can't hear it over my crazy heartbeat!”

Kokichi patiently made introductions with both of them. One was too focused on her own strange sense of humor and the other on trying to disappear from existence to have any useful information. Kokichi quickly decided to continue along the path. The next building was a hotel. In front of it was a pool and all around were 16 cottages. Kokichi noticed with a slight discomfort that their faces were drawn on the mailboxes.

’16 cottages? One for each of us? Are we 16? This looks like it was arranged for a long-term permanence. What the hell is going on, I wonder…’

Kokichi spotted a short guy in a suit and made his way over.

“Hello, I’m Ouma Kokichi, Leader. Do you know anything about our current situation?” he asked him.

“Leader? What kind of stupid introduction is that? Leader of what? And don’t come here like you’ve got any right to question me!” the guy was definitely aggressive.

“Leader of what is my own business and if you don’t want to answer that’s fine. It’s not like your attitude will change anything, are you an all bark and no bite type, perhaps?” Kokichi smiled to provoke him.

“Don be a smartass with me, who do you think you are, you idiot?! I could kill you with my eyes closed!” he showed his clenched fist.
“Is there some problem here?”

A girl with silver hair and intimidating red eyes came over, attracted by the commotion. The short guy looked even more annoyed but ultimately shut up.

“No, Peko, everything is fine, we were only asking if he remembers something about how we got here or why, that’s all.” Nagito held his hands up in a pacifying gesture.

“I see, I’m pretty sure that he doesn’t know anything, at least that’s what he told me. I don’t either, if you wanted to ask. I would like to ask you to try and maintain a peaceful atmosphere around here, I don’t want to have to kill someone…” she said as she turned her back to them.

‘Having to kill someone, talk about a peculiar thing to say…’

After both of them were out of sight Nagito gave him some explanation.

“The guy is Kuzuryu Fuyuhiko, he is the Ultimate Yakuza, not someone you really want to irritate. The girl is Peko Pekoyama, she is the Ultimate Swordswoman, another person you don’t want to irritate.”

“I am too, a person you don’t want to irritate, you know?” said Kokichi nonchalantly.

Nagito laughed softly.

“Yeah, I’m starting to realize that.”

Kokichi was not interested in the hotel interior so the two of them made their way to another area. It looked like a ranch. Right outside was a girl with a cat bag and a pink skirt. She looked a bit lost.

“Hello, I’m Ouma Kokichi, you are?” he tried to ask her.

The girl was searching inside her bag, not meeting his eyes or giving any sign that she heard.

“She is Nanami Chiaki, the Ultimate Gamer, I think that she is searching for her portable console.” Nagito intervened once again.

“You said you met a couple of them, how come you know everyone?” Kokichi raised an eyebrow.

“Let’s say that I’m an Ultimate enthusiast, I know everyone’s face and the rest of their profile.” he answered casually. Kokichi could feel a faint bad sensation coming from the other guy, but he kept it for himself. “I guess we should try to talk to her after she finds what she is looking for.”

The two left her to her occupation and headed toward the two people inside. One was a little girl in a kimono, the other a guy with blond hair and a friendly smile.

“Hello there! I’m Amami Rantaro.” he raised a hand in greeting.

“Cool name, do you know that in Italian Amami means ‘love me’? Very cool.”

Rantaro laughed softly.

“Ouma Kokichi, Ultimate Supreme Leader.” he introduced himself once again. “I have to know a lot of languages to be a good Leader, you know?”

“No, I didn’t know, but thanks for telling me.” Rantaro nodded. “I guess the name suits me. I’m the Ultimate Big Brother.”
“Oh, a step below my talent! I’m loved by the whole world, you by your little brothers and sisters.” Kokichi said with a shrug.

Rantaro laughed again.

“Who is she?” Kokichi pointed the little girl crouched on the ground.

The little girl looked too focused on whatever she was doing to notice them.

“Saijoji Hiyoko, Ultimate Traditional Dancer, she is… hmm… killing ants I think.” Rantaro had a perplexed expression.

“Fascinating.” Kokichi said with sarcasm.

“Can I accompany you? I haven’t fully explored this island yet.” Rantaro proposed.

“Sure, let’s leave her to… Let’s just go.”

Rantaro laughed once again. He really liked to laugh it seemed.

The last destination was a huge statue, the guy standing in front of it was almost as huge.

“Humph, looks like there are even more people than I thought.” said the guy with a bored expression.

“Sorry to bother you, we wanted to introduce ourselves.” Nagito tried to start a friendly conversation.

“Humph, the name is Togami Byakuya and I’m the Ultimate Affluent Progeny.”

“Komaeda Nagito, Ultimate Lucky Student.”

“Ouma Kokichi and I am your future Leader. Nice to meet you.”

“Yeah, right, as if I can belie---“

-DING DONG-

-Everyone! Assemble in front of the statue!

“What’s happening, now?”

“Looks like we are going to have a long day…”

Chapter End Notes

I'm sorry Hajime, I still love you!
I'm sorry Akane... for not being sorry at all :'

About names and honorifics:
The inconsistency of the use of first-last names and honorifics is not a mistake or something casual. It's meant to represent the differences in the two Kokichi's personalities.
The first name represents friendly.
The last name represents distance and the chan slight mockery.
Nicknames are another matter entirely, they are a sign of affection.

Feel free to post your guesses, theories and questions!
I won't answer if it's a spoiler, but feel free to discuss anything you like!
Kokichi opened the door of his new room with a sigh and then he closed it behind him. The inside was nothing special but not that bad either. The walls, floor, furniture and even the ceiling were black and white with only some hint of gray or dark blue. There was a huge monitor completed with speakers even there. The bathroom was included in the room, which was really convenient. Kokichi examined the drawers thoroughly, they were all empty. Inside the closet were 6 sets of clothes, identical to the one he was already wearing. The final verdict on the room was reached when he seated on his bed resigned.

'It’s claustrophobic.'

Kokichi took out his new Monopad, the mini tablet that was given to all the participants of the killing game. Yeah, a killing game. After they were all reunited inside the gym a robot-bear half white and half black informed them of their destiny. He opened the rules menu.

-Students must live inside this Academy, once a murder takes place the students must participate in a class trial. If the blackened is exposed they alone will be executed, otherwise, all the other students will be executed. If the blackened survives the trial they will go back to the outside world or else the killing game will continue until only three students remain. Nighttime is from 10 pm to 8 am, the gym and dining room are closed at nighttime. Violence toward Monokuma, the robot-bear, is prohibited. Monokuma will not directly interfere with a murder. The ‘Body Discovery Announcement’ will play through the whole school when three or more people discover a body. With minimal restriction, you are free to explore the Academy. The students who violate these rules will be exterminated by the Exisal–

Those rules were pretty interesting, especially the one that gave basically free access to the whole Academy. He would take advantage of that rule later. The map inside the Monopad was useless, except for the basement he already knew the basic layout of the building, and the map didn’t give any useful minor detail.

The other menus were Truth Bullet, he had no idea what this was but he could not access it anyway, and Student List. Inside was a basic assembly of information partially useless, like blood types, measurements, birthdays and another very strange information: likes and dislikes.

How did these people who kidnapped them know these things?

He did a quick check of the list.

Momota Kaito: overly trusting, not capable of seeing anything past the surface. Useless.

Hoshi Ryoma: a small, distrusting and negative ex-tennis player. He looks like the type to just follow the flow without adding much. Dubious usefulness.

Amami Rantaro: calm and calculator, he was probably the only one who was reacting in the correct way to the situation. Still a little too mysterious, though, potentially dangerous, potentially useful.
Gonta: not much in term of intelligence, very strong, nice eyes sight. He was the one that found that underground passage. In the end, it was useless, a trap, but it had been an interesting discovery still. He could be trusted with menial tasks.

Saihara Shuichi: intelligent but weak-willed. If he could somehow stop being pushed back by emotion he could be extremely useful. Too bad he was so focused on relying on everyone.

Shinguji Korekiyo: the man with the black mask. He looked at people like they were a specimen, definitely not trustworthy or useful.

K1-B0: the robot. His entire existence was an anomaly, why put a robot in a killing game?

Toujo Kirumi: she seemed very selfless and capable. Yet there was a feeling of strong will behind her façade. Potentially useful, potentially dangerous.

Yumeno Himiko: a very lazy magician, she was covering herself in delusion. Useless.


Chabashira Tenko: a martial artist that hated men. She would never be useful to him.

Shirogane Tsumugi: a plain and useless person. She didn’t seem stupid but she sure loved to look like that.

Yonaga Angie: a religious fanatic. She didn’t look very smart at all. Probably useless.

Iruma Miu: she had as much genius as idiocy. Listening to her caused headaches. Her talent looked useful.

Akamatsu Kaede: an overly positive pianist. She really didn’t understand human nature. Her optimism made her charge full force into that trap, not even noticing that the others were starting to look at her with hate and contempt.

The memory of that underground passage still made him irritated. After a couple of unsuccessful tries and the appearance of Monokuma, who mocked them, it was pretty obvious that all of it was a trap. The more Akamatsu-chan tried to inspire them the more some of them hated her and wanted to give up. A strong, optimistic person like her had no idea how much her attitude made the weak-willed feel frustrated. He did the only thing he could think of. He took the blame. By openly contrasting her he gained the contempt of her allies but more importantly, he gave the others an opening. A chance to vent frustration without exposing themselves. Then he gave them an appointment in the dining room the next day. After a night of rest they will hopefully calm themselves and if he could play well his cards he could make them all pass the whole blame on him, forgetting everything about Akamatsu-chan.

Basic human psychology.

A true Leader shouldn’t be forced to use such a cheap trick, but Kokichi was not a true Leader.

He got up with a sigh and pulled his chair in front of his door, then he piled up all the useless ornaments inside the room on top of it in a precarious balance. This wouldn’t stop anyone, but at least the noise of falling things should wake him up. He didn’t trust them not try to kill him in his sleep.

Kokichi didn’t trust human beings.
Surprisingly he fell asleep almost immediately, still fully clothed. Morning came, and he was still alive. A bit less surprising, but still a good thing. After washing his face he put back in their places all the useless stuff he gathered in front of the door and finally got out. He woke up earlier than the appointment time and he took all the time he could to investigate the outside. Beside the strange shrine there was a ninja statue, a locked little building, a locked wooden door that looked like a castle gate and a strange stone with musical notes. All very suspicious and all very useless.

During his investigation most of the other prisoners, or students as Monokuma called them, entered the building. He stole some glances at them but they looked mostly normal, collected, some even cheerful.

‘Probably nothing bad happened yet.’

With a sigh he finally forced himself to join them in the dining room. The last ones to arrive were Saihara-chan, Akamatsu-chan and Shirogane-chan.

“Hey Akamatsu-chan, are you okay? Everyone yesterday started to blame you, poor girl…” he said with fake concern.

Kokichi could see the disbelieving stares they were directing him.

‘Perfect, put the blame on me like good, easy to manipulate, kids.’

“Wasn’t you the one who started blaming her?” said Momota-chan aggressively.

“What?! Now it’s my fault?! You’re all so mean!!” Kokichi started a completely fake and over the top hysterical crying. Making himself obnoxious was a nice addition, no one would doubt his bad intentions. He didn’t need a good reputation anyway.

“Everyone, please, stop! It’s fine, I should have been more considerate of everyone feelings… I was too focused on the tunnel… I’m sorry…” said Akamatsu-chan sadly.

‘Yeah, well, at the very least you’re not completely stupid, like Momota-chan over there.’

“I’m so glad everything is settled now! That was a lie anyway, you know? One of those lies to make us more united or whatever? My lies are half of the time told with good intention!” he said with a smile.

“Yeah, right, now that’s a lie.” commented Yumeno-chan lazily.

As everyone started talking about other matters Kokichi reflected on how easy was to manipulate all of them. And how easy it was to tell the truth after everyone had already labeled you as a liar. A single unbelievable lie, about having 10.000 members, and a little façade were already enough to mark everything he said as a lie. Pretty impressive, really. Humans are such interesting creatures. No wonder he couldn’t trust any of them.

Then Monokuma appeared.

“How are you today, my dear students? I’m here to present the first motive! I mean, being put in a killing game doesn’t mean you’ll be able to kill right away! So… I’ve decided to give you a good motivation! It’s called… The First Blood Perk!”

“Don’t make it sounds like a bonus in a videogame!” yelled Chabashira-chan.

“I’ve decided not to hold a class trial for the first kill! Basically, the killer gets to graduate
immediately, no string attached! So relax and just kill! Well then, see you later!” just like that he disappeared.

‘How does he manage to appear and disappear like that? It’s not normal…’

“So, I just have to kill someone to get out?” Iruma-chan was the first one to speak. Everyone started arguing at once, creating a big chaos.

‘There we go, my work is all wasted now. Nice job stupid bear, a little push and we are back where we started. I need to think about this, alone. A speech full of hope and optimism isn’t going to help here. I need to investigate the building and find a solution.’

“Well, I want to think about all this, in my room, alone.” he said putting a finger on his lips.

He quickly fled the room, ignoring all the people who were shouting at him to get back inside.

Chapter End Notes

I've skipped some stuff, the starting speech that Monokuma gives is just too boring to rewrite completely... Also, no Monokubs, they are too annoying.
And in general, I'll shorten a bit the time frame of every chapter (game chapters I mean). Since this is from Kokichi's perspective and he is not very social, looking as he explores the school alone for days and days would be boring.
Don't worry this doesn't mean that I'll skip exploration or important stuff, I've just cut the 'free times' where he is alone, nothing else. As the story progress, and he starts to socialize, every chapter (again, game chapters) will be longer and longer.

See you on the Past Side.
A reason to murder

Kokichi opened to door of his new room and then softly closed it behind him. The inside was not that bad, the white was predominant everywhere, it gave the room a nice clean feeling. There was a canopy bed that looked really soft, a minimalist furniture and a bathroom with a large bathtub. The open window didn’t have a really nice view, but the sound of the ocean was filling the room and the salty breeze was like a caress.

‘This is a very nice place.’

Too bad the reason they were there wasn’t. A ridiculous teddy bear, probably a robot, came out of nowhere and told them that they were kidnapped because they had to take part in a human experiment. They were chosen among all the Ultimate of the nation to be kept trapped in this remote island and to conduct a psychological test on them. “How does an Ultimate react to extreme pressure?”

The bear said that the first step was: how does an Ultimate react to a memory loss?

Apparently, they had forgotten two years of their lives. Which was ridiculous, Kokichi was not going to believe something so sci-fi as inducted memory loss. The test itself was extremely cut and dry.

“Kill someone and you’ll have your memories back and you’ll be able to go back home!”

The uncertainty of a potential memory loss, the kidnapping, the possibility that someone may kill you… Extreme pressure.

‘This thing lacks so much in term of refinement. The person behind this really knows nothing about subtlety. But this may be what will save us… If the intent behind this is so clear, it’ll be more difficult for us to fall for such cheap tricks.’

Kokichi sat on the bed and took out his E-handbook. He had a suspicion that this thing was a tracking device, but he didn’t trust to throw it away and not get killed a moment later. If they were serious about this test it was imperative to be as careful as possible until he found a way out of the island. He switched on his device.

Inside were only two menus, Truth Bullet, he had no idea what this was but he could not access it anyway, and Students List. The latter was a basic assembly of information partially useless, like blood types, measurements, birthdays and likes and dislikes.

He did a quick check of the list to see the names and talents of the people he met in front of the statue for the first time.

‘Beside all the people that I’ve met before there is… Nevermind Sonia, Princess; Hanamura Teruteru, Cook; Koizumi Mahiru, Photographer and last Nidai Nekomaru, Team Manager. We really are a strange lot. I wonder what makes us special, why were we selected?’

After the bear speech, all of them went in separate ways. Thinking back maybe he should have tried
to create a sense of unity, do something, as Leader it was his responsibility, after all. But at the same
time, he was a cautious person, his talent worked better after he acquired a good understanding of
everyone basic psychology. Sure, he already had a basic understanding of their personality, but the
probability of a mistake was still too big for him to take the risk.

He sighed while putting his E-handbook away. Sometimes he wished to be a little more reckless.

After putting on a pajama that was inside a closet, together with 6 spare sets of clothes identical to his
own, he tried to sleep. Ha had to suffer through half an hour of thoughts fighting each other in his
head before he could finally sleep.

Morning came. He took his time putting on his clothes, wearing something so familiar was always a
good thing for his mood. Feeling much calmer and confident he started to make his way toward the
restaurant inside the hotel, on the way he spotted Kazuichi but the guy was clearly not interested in
talking to him. He looked scared of his own shadow.

‘Yeah, good start…’

He decided to talk to him later, for now, it was best to see if everyone was alright. Almost everyone
was, indeed, inside the restaurant.

“What do you think we need in a situation like this?” Byakuya was talking to them.

“An escape plan?” said Mahiru with sarcasm.

“Yeah, but before that.” he dismissed her.

“Friendship! A bond of trust between us!” Nagito intervened enthusiastically.

“Close, but not quite. What we need is a solid leadership. Rejoice, I shall accept that position.” said
Byakuya crossing his arms over his chest.

“Wait, wait, wait, there are other people here who have leadership skills like Sonia, Nekomaru and
Kokichi. Why you?” protested Mahiru.

“Because I’m destined to stand above all people. And because I was the first one to suggest it, if any
of those people had tried we could have had a competition of sort but apparently none of them want
the position. So I’m taking it.” he said in a very matter of fact manner.

‘I’m actually okay with this. I’d rather wait and see, I can always take the lead later when my
position is more solid. By leaving the leadership to someone else and putting myself in the opposite
front as soon as a mistake is made I can gain a significant advantage. Basic politics.’

“As new Leader, the first thing I want to say is this: I’ll not allow any of you to be a victim. None of
you will die until I’m alive. So we are going to find an escape route together.” Kokichi was a bit
impressed. To be able to promise something like that so easily… “Anyway tonight you’re all
recruited, we are having a party. Can you guys suggest a place that’s enclosed and protected from
external influence?”

“Why? This looks suspicious. And you basically decided to be the Leader on your own, you didn’t
even ask for our opinion!” Mahiru, the photographer, did not look very impressed by him. Kokichi
instead could see his point. Nagito could too.

“If we are all together in an enclosed space we can keep an eye on each other. Nothing bad will
happen. I think it’s a great idea! Why don’t we use the abandoned building on the left of the hotel?
It’s enclosed and big enough to contain all of us.”

“But that place is really dirty and worn down, not very encouraging for a party. If we want to use that place we need to clean it.”

Rantaro’s big brother power apparently included a variety of pragmatic skills, he was already one steps ahead of the others. Nagito’s luck clearly came with an even wider variety as he was already four steps ahead.

“I’ve prepared a drawing, in case something like this ever happened.”

Or maybe his talent was not luck at all as it turned out that he was the loser. He was in charge of cleaning the whole building, while Teruteru was in charge of the cooking. Having reached a conclusion for the near future actions everyone started to scatter. Only him and Nagito remained behind.

“Ah, too bad, I wanted to see how an Ultimate Supreme Leader would face such a big challenge, especially now that a contestant for the title appeared. Looks like I won’t be able to.” Nagito said to him with a smile.

“Don’t worry, I’m not going to make a move anytime soon. You won’t lose anything. But you’re not really lucky are you?” he commented raising an eyebrow.

“It this how you see me? I guess. Well, I don’t really mind, I’m good at cleaning.” Nagito looked completely at ease.

“See you later, then.”

Kokichi made his way down the stairs and found himself in the middle of a conversation. Sonia and Mahiru were talking about the Leader position again. Chiaki was nearby, playing one of the arcades in the room. Rantaro was outside the open glass door, clearly eavesdropping, trying to look as casual as possible.

“Sonia, I really think that you are better suited for the Leader position than Byakuya!” was saying Mahiru.

“Please, perish the thought! I always served as a representative figure, I’ve never actually had to do any decision making and my leadership skills are not that impressive! I’m relieved that a capable person like Byakuya has taken the role for us!” she answered with modesty. “Oh, Kokichi, I actually desire to hear your opinion on the matter!”

Both girls turned to face him. Mahiru didn’t look particularly comfortable.

“Oh, right… You’re supposed to be the Ultimate Supreme Leader, aren’t you? Honestly, I don’t have that much faith in you either. You don’t look very reliable.”

“Personally, I don’t think that we should force Sonia into something she doesn’t want, considering that we already have too many people with leadership skills. About me, for now, I’m content with him being the Leader, an open fight for the leadership would only make us weaker at the moment.” he said putting his hands in his pockets.

“I… see. I guess I have no other choice than accept the situation…” Mahiru finally gave up and sighed.

“I’m going to take my leave now, I want to take another look around the island.”
“See you later at the party, then.” said Sonia with a friendly smile.

Kokichi stepped out of the hotel and gave a questioning look at Rantaro. The blond guy smiled.

“Can I join you?”

Chapter End Notes

Disregard the plot of D2.
Disregard Hope's Peak and Junko.
One of the reasons I chose to switch Hajime and Kokichi was because Izuru's plotline is not needed in this story.
So, take for granted that Junko and the school never existed in the first place, not even as fiction.
Which means that you can disregard that aspect of chapter 6 of V3 too.
My story is an AU set in a different universe entirely. No hope/despair loop of infinite.
Kokichi left the dining room in search of a hiding spot. It was bad planning on his part, not having one ready in advance. He reached the entrance and was debating whatever to go outside or try to hide in the basement that he had yet to explore. That was when Monokuma appeared again.

“Hey, hey, what are you running away from in such a hurry?” he snickered.

“Ah, my lovely headmaster, what do you want from little ol’me?”

A farce, a fake pleasantry and both of them knew.

“I just wanted to inform you that the Ultimate Labs are now open! I wonder if that’s something that can catch your interest? Well, I’m leaving you to your interesting activities! Goodbye!” he popped out of existence just like that.

‘Ultimate Lab? I have seen a building outside and a music room… Are those two Ultimate Labs?’

Momentarily forgetting his need to hide he stared at the floor contemplating his next move. For some reason he couldn’t focus really well, his mind was more interested in a strange black line on the floor than the possibility of snooping around other people’s Labs. The black line formed a perfect square around a white tile, the tile where the robot-bear was standing a moment ago.

Kokichi didn’t trust humans, but he did trust his instinct. Very much so.

The dark line was a soft, gummy texture under his fingers. He grabbed the edge of the tile and pulled with all of his strength. As he observed the dark tunnel underneath he realized. This was a passage to his Lab. This was made for him and him only.

He quickly jumped down and closed the tiled, he didn’t want anyone to see his new secret hiding spot. How considerate of the people who kidnapped them to give him exactly what he needed. Like they knew that he was the kind of person that needed a secret spot where he could be alone with his thought and let the façade slip for a bit.

How did they know this?

The inside of his Lab made him snort with disdain. It was full of junk. It was not, in any way, an Ultimate Supreme Leader Lab. It was more like a Batman Enthusiast Lab, or a Phantom Thief Lab. But there was something worth mention. On a wall were ten monitors, each of them was showing a part of the building. No private areas, like the dormitory rooms or the bathrooms, but a lot of communitarian areas like the dining room, the gym and the warehouse. A warehouse? He didn’t investigate that area either, he really needed to pick up the pace here. He studied the control panel for the monitors, some of them were black and they wouldn’t turn on no matter what. Even more importantly, there was no recording function. Which meant that he could only see what was happening on screen while he was present.

‘This is really a big downside. A recording function would…’

Would have made his Lab a secret spying base. He could do a lot of good with this. And a lot of evil
Kokichi felt a bad sensation filling his stomach, he didn’t like what all of this was suggesting him. It was like the kidnappers were expecting him to plan murders, to uncover other people’s secrets, to exploit weaknesses, to hurt others.

‘This is ridiculous, it’s just my imagination. They clearly don’t understand what an Ultimate Supreme Leader does. It’s clear just by looking at how they decorated my Lab. This place is only good as a hiding spot, nothing else.’

He needed to get out of there. He had other places to investigate anyway. The rest of the day passed fairly quickly, he investigated the music room, the basement, the game room, the AV room and the library, he even took a peek inside the female bathroom. Nothing useful anywhere. Obviously, he didn’t look through every movie, every book and every CD, he was not that desperate yet. He spied a little on his fellow prisoners too, Chabashira-chan and Yumeno-chan spent the whole day together, so they did Akamatsu-chan and Saihara-chan, Shinguji spent the day observing others, Gonta searching for bugs, Iruma-chan in her Lab. Her Lab was the only place he could not investigate since she never left it.

The third day started much like the second, only that this time in the dining room Monokuma announced a time limit. If no one was dead by the end of the next day he would kill them all with the Exisals, those giant robot-weapons.

‘A time limit to force our hands. What an amateur thing to do. Stupid, but still effective, I guess. The reason why they are having us doing this is still a complete mystery. I don’t have any useful info, to blackmail them for example, and they seem to have a lot of info on us. The building doesn’t seem to contain any communication devices, like a phone or a computer. I can’t say if they are watching us from inside, from a place like my Lab, or from outside. I can’t see any camera though… But they must be watching us, it makes no sense otherwise. Maybe I should try and infiltrate the area under construction.’

He tried to find a way up but there were no stairs anywhere, from inside he was definitely not capable of climbing the walls of the entrance hall where a big balcony showed a portion of the second floor he had never been to. While he was trying to find a way up from outside he was approached by Amami-chan.

“Hey, Kokichi, do you have a minute for me?” he raised a hand in greeting.

“My beloved Love-me-chan, sure! What do you want from a little liar like me?” he smiled broadly.

“You know, I don’t know what are you doing but I think you have your own agenda here.” he looked at him in the eyes.

“Ohh, how intriguing! You think I’m the mastermind behind all this, perhaps? That I’m enjoying a bit of chaos and terror? I am a Supreme Leader of evil after all!” he did his signature laugh.

“Hm. How curious that you’re the first person who mentioned a mastermind.” Amami-chan smiled a little, suspiciously.

Wait, what? Did he said mastermind? He meant to say kidnappers. There was a strange feeling of disconnect in his mind while he looked at Amami-chan.

“Anyway, no. I don’t think that. I wanted to ask you if you know the term Ultimate Hunt.” he looked cautious.
“Never heard of it. What’s that?” he asked tilting his head a little.

“I see… So I’m really the only one. Well, it’s fine. How is your investigation going?” he changed tone pretty quickly.

“Not so well.”

Kokichi was not surprised that he noticed what he was doing, he seemed the smartest of all of them. They spent the rest of the day looking around together and speaking about what they noticed. Obviously, Kokichi didn’t mention his Lab. The day ended and nothing new came up. He was starting to worry. What was he supposed to do? He didn’t have anything to say to the others, Akamatsu-chan and Momota-chan were already taking care of the whole optimistic speech thing. He seriously doubted that he could do anything better.

That night he could not sleep at all. He had not found anything, he had no clue and no escape route. The probability of them being able to fight against the Exisals was zero. He needed a plan. Amami-chan mentioned that Hoshi-chan had offered his life. He’d rather not sacrifice anyone if he could help it. But what if that decision would cause the death of all of them?

After lunch Akamatsu-chan approached him. She apparently made a mission for herself to talk to everyone, probably to assure that a murder would not occur.

“Oh, have you got bored of hanging out with your boyfriend?” he mocked her.

“Are you talking about Shuichi? Does any of you have anything better to do than gossip about us?” she sighed.

“Sooo, how far have you two gone?” his tone was conspiratory.

“Wh—What?!” she took a step back.

“How far have you two explored this school, silly! What were you thinking?” he smiled at her with his hands behind his head.

“That’s none of your business!” she was starting to sound irritated.

“Well, that’s fine, I don’t trust people who talk too much. It’s best to keep your cards at heart, you know?” he put a finger on his lips, an expression of warning on his face.

“You’re not making any sense, it’s obviously better to talk to people! It’s by communicating that you can trust other people!” she was clearly losing her patience.

“Sense? Obviously? Do you even know what are you talking about? Common sense is a nice definition, for something that doesn’t exist. Everyone has a different view of what is common and what is sense. What's common for you it’s probably not common for me or even for Saihara-chan. Don’t force your view of the world on other people.”

Kokichi knew that making such philosophical discussion right before a potential murder was about to be consumed was a bad idea. He was going to jump straight in the top position in the list of suspects. He still couldn’t help himself. Akamatsu-chan, evidently fed up with him, left him after telling him to not murder anyone. He was not planning to in the first place.

When evening came, Kokichi did the only thing he could think of. He shut himself inside his Lab and watched the others on the monitors. They were divided into two big groups, one inside the dining room and one down the basement, Akamatsu-chan and Saihara-chan were nowhere to be
seen but they were surely together. Only Hoshi-chan and Kiibo were alone in their rooms. As long as he kept an eye on them a murder was not going to occur. He knew where everyone was after all.

He was trying to convince himself that no one could be so bored to kidnap 16 kids and then just kill them all in one go. The kidnappers probably wanted some kind of sick entertainment… They weren’t going to just kill…

-A BODY HAS BEEN DISCOVERED!-

-Please assemble at the library!-

Kokichi ran at full speed, not stopping until he barged into the library.

Where Amami Rantaro’s lifeless body was lying.
Ironic

“Why were you spying on us, my beloved Love-me-chan?”

“I was interested in your conversation. I was wondering why a Supreme Leader would accept someone else leadership. So where are we going?” Rantaro shrugged.

“I want to check the beach again.”

Rantaro didn’t comment on his choice and just followed him. The beach was the same as before. Or so he thought until he noticed a white, long thing sticking out of the sand. He pulled it up.

“Ohh, thank you, my dear, I needed some help!”

Kokichi and Rantaro quickly stepped back as a white rabbit jumped out of the sand and started babbling.

“Another one of these strange things?!” Rantaro was a bit scared.

“Wonderful, first a bear and now a rabbit! What’s next? A dinosaur?” said Kokichi with sarcasm.

“Bear? My dear children, what are you talking about? There is only two of you here? Where are the others?” the rabbit looked around.

“Are you an ally of Monokuma?” Kokichi asked her with suspicion.

“Monokuma? How do you know this name? Wait… Don’t tell me… He didn’t… did he?” she was sweating heavily.

“Did what?” pressured Rantaro.

“Infilitrate the project! The Talent Cultivation Project! You sixteen Ultimate were brought here to deepen your bond, develop your talent… create the future! It’s an experimental project with the objective to finally reunite the Ultimate scattered across the country and create a harmonious atmosphere of cooperation! You all agreed to participate! Don’t tell me you have forgotten?!” she was looking more and more agitated.

“I’m not sure we are on the same page here. The bear told us that we were kidnaped and put in an experiment to test how we would react to extreme pressure. Apparently, we have to kill each other, too.” said Kokichi putting his hands in his hoodie pockets.

“What?! No, no way!! I have to find him! See you later!”

The rabbit disappeared past the horizon in a flash leaving them in her dust.

“Do you think that what she said is true?” asked Rantaro uncertainly.
“I don’t know about that… There are two possibilities. Either our memories are fine, she is lying and her story is completely made up or our memories had been tampered with and she is telling the truth. I don’t know which one is the best thing to hope for.” he sighed.

“Well, if this was an official project then someone must know we are here!” tried Rantaro.

“But if that is true and we take for good the memory loss theory it means that two years have passed. Do you feel two years older?” he was not convinced at all.

“I’m not sure about that… Anyway, we should get back to the others.”

They reached the abandoned building and were greeted by Byakuya who performed a body check on them to search for dangerous items. Kokichi was impressed by how seriously he was taking his leadership position. Maybe he didn’t have to become the Leader of this group after all. That was okay, Kokichi was not desperate to be a Leader at every cost. Once inside Rantaro left to explain their discoveries to the others while he followed Byakuya into the kitchen where he confiscated all dangerous items, including forks and knives. Then he helped him put the metal case full of pointy items in the office, where Peko offered to stand guard.

Once they were all reunited, with the exception of Peko, Teruteru and Fuyuhiko who did not come to the party at all, they started eating and discussing the possibility of believing the rabbit. The peaceful atmosphere didn’t last long. Suddenly a black out occurred and everyone started to panic. When finally the light came back on Byakuya was under a table, dead in a pool of his own blood.

The panic escalated even further until Monokuma appeared and silenced everyone.

“Heeeeeeey!! Stop making such a scene! Geez! I can’t even distribute the Monokuma Files in this chaos!” he yelled at them.

With a bip, all their handbooks lighted up at once inside their pockets. The Truth Bullet menu was now available, inside there was a photo option, for ‘collecting evidence’ apparently, and a Monokuma File N1.

“Well then! Now you have all you need! Start investigating already!” the bear was snickering.

“Investigating? What do you mean?” asked Sonia with her hand on her mouth.

“I mean… That one of you killed Byakuya! And you’re going to discover who, and that person will be punished! On the other hand, if you can’t identify the culprit then I’ll kill everyone here besides the killer! Have you forgotten that this is an experiment? Don’t tell me you really expected to go home like nothing happened after a murder! Geez, kids these days! Did no one taught you that you have to take responsibility for your actions?!”

Monokuma disappeared in his usual manner and everyone started talking and panicking again. Kokichi went to stand in front of the body, blocking the way just in case, and opened the Monokuma File.

-The victim is Togami Byakuya, Ultimate Survivor. He was killed by multiple stabs to the abdomen, no foreign substances were detected in his body-

“Ultimate Survivor? What?!” he couldn't stop himself.

Everyone raised their voices and opened the Monokuma File to confirm it themselves.

“Did he lied to us?” commented Rantaro darkly.
“What does this means!?” Mahiru was losing her composure.

Kokichi put away his handbook and considered the situation, right now they weren’t lucid enough to talk about who should be in charge of things, they probably didn’t even want a new Leader at all. The investigation came first anyway, Kokichi could try to gain they trust afterward, survival was the number one priority. It wasn’t like he was completely unaffected by the death of a companion but Kokichi was a logic-type person. What needs to be done first, mourning and feelings later. Nagito came closer to him and offered his help in the investigation.

‘This guy seems intelligent and lucid enough, it would be better to have him by my side than alone doing who knows what.’

Kokichi pulled up his hood.

Time to get serious.

Chapter End Notes

It's ironic that both Ultimate Survivors died first, right?
Is it a coincidence though?

As I said the storyline for D2 is different but not only that, I've changed the cases a little too.
Not the important parts, but I've eliminated some parts to make it a lot faster and in general, I've completely ignored some of the most ridiculously convenient parts like the fire doors that helped the killer to hide in this case.
The idea of D2 was that Junko had predicted most of this stuff in advance and gave the exact things that they needed to plan the murders and solve them (anyone remembers the stupid rule about not changing in the beach house?).
I've changed the solving method a little, Kokichi will work more on logic alone than on strange and convenient proof.
And D2 will work differently regarding the trials too, basically, you can use the canon as a reference for the murders/killers but follow me for everything else.
Kokichi was staring at the body of the person formerly known as Amami Rantaro while everyone else around him was panicking. To avoid looking too unnatural he forced himself out of the trance and spat the first thing that came to mind.

“Why was my beloved Amami-chan killed?!”

He served the sentence with an obnoxious screech and some fake tears, just to add a bit of flavor. Obviously, everyone started to gang up on him immediately. Kokichi didn’t really mind, as long as they had not noticed his genuine reaction. He didn’t know why but when he looked at his body he felt truly startled. Then slowly his mind pulled out strange thoughts like ‘This wasn’t supposed to happen’ or ‘Why him of all people?’.

That feeling of disconnect raised again. Why would it matter if the victim was Rantaro or someone else? He knew him just as well as anyone in the room. Not at all.

He pushed everything out of his mind when Monokuma appeared from nowhere like always.

“Well then! Finally, something happened! I was starting to get bored here! Would the person who killed him raise their hand, please? Thanks to the First Blood Perk that person gets to graduate!” he threw his paws in the air. No one moved, they looked at each other with clear mistrust. “Ohh, how interesting! That person has no need for the Perk! They rather do a class trial! Very well then! Here is the Monokuma File, to help with your investigation! Now, start deducing!”

The bear disappeared while their Monopad lighted up with a bip. The Truth Bullet menu was now available, inside there was a photo option, for ‘collecting evidence’ apparently, and a Monokuma File N1.

-The victim is Amami Rantaro, the Ultimate ???. He was killed by a blown to the back of his head-

“Can we even trust this thing? Monokuma made it after all.” asked Momota-chan.

Saihara-chan kneeled beside Amami-chan’s body and started examining it along with the iron ball nearby.

“The wound looks consistent with what’s written on the Monokuma File. I think that we can somehow trust it for now.” then he extracted Amami-chan’s Monopad and the key to his private room. “He doesn’t have anything else on him, which means he really isn’t the mastermind…”

*That word.*

“Mastermind, what do you mean?” asked Hoshi-chan.

Saihara-chan and Akamatsu-chan looked guilty. They started to explain how they noticed a secret door behind a bookcase, then how they decided to place a trap inside the room. Kokichi was a bit annoyed that he hadn’t noticed the door himself. Saihara-chan retrieved the three cameras and the sensor that picked up movements. Toujo-chan and Hoshi-chan took the task of developing the film. The killer was most likely in one of the photos. Kokichi left the library when they started collecting...
alibis, he already knew them. With his Lab monitors he had been able to retrace everyone’s movements. Harukawa-chan, Yumeno-chan, Yonaga-chan, Chabashira-chan, Momota-chan and Gonta were together in the game room and no one appeared on his monitors. One of his monitors showed the library entrance door, he would have seen them enter. He could not see the back door but they would have still been caught on the cameras placed inside. None of them was the killer. Iruma-chan, Toujo-chan, Shinguji and Shirogane-chan were together in the dining room. Shirogane-chan left to use the bathroom, though. Hoshi-chan and Kiibo were inside their rooms and they had not passed through the entrance hall unless there was a secret entrance that he could not find during his investigation, and he was not going to believe that, they were not the killer either. There were literally only three people who could be the killer: Shirogane-chan, Akamatsu-chan and Saihara-chan. Assuming Saihara-chan’s innocence would mean that the cameras worked normally and if Shirogane-chan was the killer then she would be in the pictures. If no one was in the pictures then Saihara-chan was either the killer or Akamatsu-chan’s accomplice. They probably tampered with the cameras somehow giving themselves perfect alibis since they would not appear in any of the pictures. No one was there to confirm what they were doing, after all. He would have a solid evidence as soon as the pictures were developed. During the wait he investigated the classroom where the two supposedly stood guard. The only interesting thing in there was a vent that connected with the library.

‘Is it possible to roll the ball that killed him through here?’

He returned to the library and found a peculiar void between the stacked books on top of the bookcase. He gained a lot of confidence in his theory.

‘This doesn’t tell me which one did it but it was one of them for sure.’

They reunited inside the warehouse to look at the pictures. On one was in any of them except Amami-chan, exactly as Kokichi predicted.

-DING DONG-

-Please, assemble at the shrine of judgment!-

For some reason, Kokichi felt the need to pull up a hood that did not exist. He settled for fidgeting with his checkered scarf for a bit. Time to get serious.

The ‘shrine of judgment’ was that strange shrine with the read door, inside now was a big Monokuma’s statue. Once all of them were reunited the red door closed behind them and the statue sank into the fountain. The waterfall split and an elevator door appeared. They ride on it with some protest, Kokichi noticed that Saihara-chan and Akamatsu-chan were whispering something with their heads close to each other. Maybe they were creating their version of facts.

The elevator destination was a large room with a circle of podiums, Kokichi could count sixteen of them, one for each person. Monokuma appeared on a red throne that was in a higher position and told them to take their position inside one of the podiums. Once they were all positioned, one of the podium had a picture of Rantaro with a red X on it, they looked at one another, filled with mistrust. The conversation started really tentatively, the first one to talk was Shinguji that asked why Amami-chan had gone to the library. They argued a little about the possibility of him being the mastermind but quickly discarded the idea, then Hoshi-chan proposed that maybe it was the mastermind that told him to go there.

"It may have been a trap... Maybe the mastermind wanted to kill him!"

"Then the culprit is the mastermind and they probably knew about the cameras!" Akamatsu-chan
was getting fired up.

'I don't know about the mastermind but the killer surely knew about the cameras, it was the person that placed them after all!'

"Well then! Looks like you're ready even to face a cold hard truth Akamatsu-chan!" he shouted out of the blue. "I've already figured out who killed him! It's Iruma-chan! She prepared the cameras!"

He was actually hinting at Saihara-chan without exposing himself too much. If they were intelligent after establishing that Iruma-chan had an alibi they should put him next on the suspect list. Shinguji obviously corroborated Iruma-chan's alibi but his plan failed because they didn't suspect Saihara-chan afterward. Kokichi let his thought wander a bit while they wasted a lot of time collecting all the alibies. Then Toujo-chan proposed an interesting theory about Gonta, he could have thrown the shot put ball from inside the AV room and killed him without getting caught on camera. Too bad that the open bookcase was in the way of a clear shot like that, so her theory was rejected. It was very good though, Kokichi was happy to see at least a good idea.

After Gonta was cleared of suspects they hit a dead end once again. Kokichi observed Saihara-chan attentively as everyone else panicked, he looked lost in thought. Was he going to confess or was he going to try and kill them all? Akamatsu-chan started blabbering about the mastermind once again, asking if anyone had seen Amami-chan talking to someone suspicious. Who for example? Kokichi? Amami-chan himself? He looked perfectly suspicious without anyone else help. Yonaga-chan interrupted her and proposed that the mastermind was hidden in the hidden room all along. Kokichi considered that possibility for a bit but then he rejected it. He knew where everyone was before the murder, the only three people he had no alibis for were Hoshi-chan, Kiibo and Shirogane-chan for a limited timeframe. He excluded that the dorm was connected to the hidden room, they would need a ridiculously long underground tunnel, and the courtyard was not that big that one could hide perfectly a secret entrance. The hidden passage needed to be inside the school, again the only three suspect were Saihara-chan, Akamatsu-chan and Shirogane-chan. The pictures proved that it could not have been Shirogane-chan. It didn't matter if she entered through the front door, the rear door or the hidden door, she still would be on camera. On the other hand, Saihara-chan and Akamatsu-chan could be both the mastermind or either one or neither, as long as they were in this together they could be whatever they wanted. They had been hidden somewhere his cameras could not film, after all, if they were allies of the kidnappers then it made only sense that they would know the placement of his cameras. Then they proposed that the killer came out of the vent, Akamatsu-chan said that it was impossible because she staked the books in front of it.

'Not the killer, through the vent rolled the murder weapon. But... was her who placed those books? Then they really are in this together!'

To everyone surprise, Iruma-chan had a vital clue to offer, apparently, the camera had a 30 seconds interval between taking a picture and the next one. And Saihara-chan knew it. Well, his guilt was basically proved at this point. The problem was which one of the two rolled the ball from the vent. The other probably lured Amami-chan to the murder weapon path. Everyone reached the conclusion that those thirty seconds were used to kill him. It was not entirely correct but almost.

"Then the killer is Iruma-chan!" he shouted cheerfully. "She knew about the intervals!"

"Don't be stupid, I have an alibi!" she shouted back.

"Oh, right!" obviously he knew that. "Then, who else knew about the interval? Now, who was it again?"

Akamatsu-chan fake surprised made him sick. What a big fat liar she was. She tried to corroborate
his alibi, how stupid. She used the excuses that they were together in the classroom when the sensor informed them that Amami-chan was moving the bookcase. They were in this together so it mattered less than zero, but he could humor her if she wanted. Kokichi was not going to let them take control of this debate any further.

"But, Akamatsu-chan..." he put a finger on his lips. "Who was that placed the sensor in the bookcase? It was Saihara-chan, wasn't he? How do you know for certain that he place it correctly? How do we know that it was placed correctly?" he emphasized the 'we', subtly hinting at the fact that she may not care if it was placed correctly or not but they did.

She fought back, the camera would not have taken the pictures if the sensor was not placed on the bookcase. Hoshi-chan helped him, maybe the sensor was placed but Saihara-chan could have turned off the alarm to avoid alerting Akamatsu-chan. Again, they were in this together so it didn't matter at all but Hoshi-chan had the timing wrong. Without the alarm Saihara-chan couldn't know when Amami-chan had moved the bookcase, it was not possible for him to ran all the way from the classroom library and kill him in 30 seconds without time this perfectly. It should have been a terribly lucky coincidence. And the bookcase was closing when they entered the library, Momota-chan and Chabashira-chan testified that much. Meaning Amami-chan was killed much later, the bookcase was automatically closing after only thirty seconds. The interval between the time they all went to the basement and the bookcase closing was too long. Amami-chan died only seconds before they all entered the library. It was possible since the method was different from what they were all thinking. They just needed to roll the ball at the right moment from the classroom, his only doubt was how they lured him in the right spot. Maybe Saihara-chan told him to check the camera? In the last picture it looked like he was reaching for it.

Akamatsu-chan tried to cover for him by pulling something out of her ass. She said that she had the receiver the whole time and he could not turn it off. It was such a crystal clear lie that Kokichi was almost impressed. Almost. Time to call out bullshit.

"These two are pretty buddy-buddy with each other. They are clearly covering for each other." he grinned malevolently. "A talented liar like me can recognize a lie like this easily."

Then something strange happened. Akamatsu-chan asked Saihara-chan to reveal to everyone what was on his mind, because he was not the killer. The Detective then revealed that the last photo had an important clue in it, the flash was used to lure Amami-chan in that spot. That was a problem solved but what about it? It was almost like Saihara-chan was going to confess. Were they going to admit defeat? The photo detail was useful only to reveal the real killing method.

Moments later Kokichi was completely overwhelmed. The flash had been set by Akamatsu-chan. The books were set by Akamatsu-chan. The ball had been rolled in the vent by Akamatsu-chan. Everything had been set up by her. In secret. Kokichi was wrong. The killer was not Saihara-chan with Akamatsu-chan as an accomplice. They weren't even accomplices at all. Akamatsu-chan did everything right behind his back. Alone.

"Akamatsu-san rolled the ball down the vent, the ball followed the path that she created with the books and hit Amami-kun in the head right in the spot where he had been lured..." Saihara-chan explained with hurt in his voice.

The case was closed. There was just no way that the little Detective was capable of lying so incredibly well, it was the truth. The feeling of hurt on his face was real. Kokichi was... feeling really mean.

'Akamatsu-chan, the most trustworthy person, the most hopeful person, just goes and stabs her 'best friend' in the back like that. And kill someone. God this is golden! I haven't assisted at such powerful
betrayal in such a long time!"

"But this is so unfortunate, you know?" he was feeling really really really mean. "I mean, it's Akamatsu-chan we are talking about! She kept preaching us about trust and friendship and then she goes and kill in cold blood!"

"No, that's wrong!" Saihara-chan shouted. "She didn't kill for her sake, she killed for our sake! She said it multiple times during this trial... her motive. Akamatsu-san... you were trying to end the killing game by killing the mastermind! You tried to save us all!"

Akamatsu-chan was voted as the killer. Kokichi was feeling completely thrown out of balance as he stepped out of his podium. He had taken it too far with his mistrust. The girl killed, sure, but Saihara-chan was right. A person like her could not kill without a good reason. He had been so incredibly blind. He was so focused on his own little theory that he forgot to do the most basic action that every person should always do. Paying attention to his surroundings. He should have noticed immediately that the girl was sending some clear call for help. She was screaming her pain and conviction through all the trial. He had really been the little bastard that everyone was accusing him to be.

He observed in silence as the girl cried and asked for forgiveness for her crime. She killed an innocent, but she did it believing in her motive to the very end, even if she had to dirty her own hands she still kept going with iron determination and tried to save them all. She did way more than him. He could forgive her. Amami-chan's death was terrible, but he could truly forgive her.

"Well, Akamatsu-chan, you definitely weren't boring." he told her as goodbye.

He forced himself to watch as the Pianist was dragged up by a metal collar that suddenly closed around her neck and then she was hung. She was hung above a piano, while forced to play a song that Kokichi recognized, even as distorted as it was. It was a song that was played by beginners, it was common knowledge that if you couldn't play this song properly you were garbage at playing the piano. Monokuma not only killed her in such a gruesome way, he made her execution a real humiliation for her. Mocking her most loved thing in the world, her most treasured skill.

He observed absently as Saihara-chan cried and cried, blaming himself for not noticing, for everything. Momota-chan punched him in the face to make him return to his senses.

Kokichi's determination to end this killing game solidified. He was never going to just watch again. Never.
The first real test

Kokichi wanted to examine the body as fast as possible, he was scared that the culprit would tamper with important clues or hints. He kneeled under the table avoiding the blood. There was an object that looked like binoculars near his body, and a knife.

“These are night vision goggle, I have seen them at the supermarket while I was searching for cleaning supply.” intervened Nagito.

“I see, thank you, that’s interesting. On the other hand, why did the culprit painted this duce tape under the table with glowing paint if he had the night vision goggles? These two things were not done by the same person. Assuming that the knife is the murder weapon then the night vision goggles were Byakuya’s. That would explain how he got under the table in the dark.”

“Why are you assuming that he got under the table himself?” Nagito asked crouching beside him.

“Because he is a very massive guy, no one could have dragged him under the table without letting him making a sound. And the blood is here, he was killed here, under this table.” explained Kokichi.

“I see, nice thinking, anything else?”

Kokichi got up and turned to look at Mikan, the Ultimate Nurse.

“I’m sorry to ask, do you think you can take a look at his wounds? I don’t know much about this kind of things.” he tried to sound reassuring.

“Y-yeah, I’ll do m-my best!” she immediately hurried by the body's side.

His request attracted everyone attention, now they were all staring at him. He quickly explained his deduction then asked them if they had something useful for the investigation. Mahiru raised her hand.

“I have photos of everyone before the blackout if you want to see…” she hesitated.

“Yes, thank you, but before that, has anyone seen Fuyuhiko, Peko or Teruteru?”

Chiaki raised her hand this time.

“I have seen Fuyuhiko outside before entering, he said he didn’t want to join the party, he should still be outside. Peko should still be in the office… Teruteru in the kitchen.” she tilted her head a little.

“Chiaki, can I ask you to search for Fuyuhiko outside? In the meantime, can you please check if there is any way to enter the building from outside? Take a photo if you find anything.”

“Hell Hound Earring! Come back to me!” a shout came from the far back of the room.

“Gundham? Ah, I mean, Supreme Overlord of Ice, what’s wrong?” he asked getting closer to him.
“What’s wrong’ he said… Don’t you understand, you fiend, that if that earring is lost the whole world will be swallowed by shadows?” he said with an aggressive voice, crossing his arms.

“I see, and where it is?” Kokichi ignored his tone.

“Under the floor, the floorboards are full of cracks and it slipped through.” Gundham looked extremely displeased.

“Go with Chiaki, maybe you can find a way to go under the floor from outside, that would be important.”

After the two of them left he turned to the remaining people.

“None of you move, please, I’m going to search for Teruteru and Peko with Nagito.” his voice firm but he didn’t want to give a direct order.

“Wait, I need to go to the bathroom! It was occupied earlier, before the blackout, and I really need to go!” another loud shout.

“All right Nekomaru, find someone that can stay with you so that you can keep an eye on each other.” he quickly conceded.

“Are you really suspecting us? You seem pretty eager to take the lead now that Byakuya is gone… how do we know that it wasn’t you who did it?” said Kazuichi with a bitter tone.

“You don’t need to believe me now, that’s exactly why I’m forming groups of two people at least. This way no one can tamper with the evidence. Someone killed him. I don’t know who but that’s not an excuse for not doing anything, don’t you think?” he looked at him in the eyes until he hung his head and scratched his cheek.

Kokichi and Nagito entered the office, only to find it desert, the metal case was still there. They checked inside and all the pointing items were still there, Kokichi had a good memory, he was sure. After confirming that the metal case had not been tampered with Peko reappeared, she was very embarrassed and explained that she had a stomachache and was stuck in the bathroom the whole time. Kokichi was pretty sure that her alibi was confirmed by Nekomaru’s previous statement. Before entering the kitchen, Kokichi decided to take a look inside a room he had not noticed before. It was a small storage room and inside were three irons, still hot. Kokichi took a picture of them. Nagito started complaining about the dust and left. Kokichi was about to follow when he saw a tablecloth thrown inside a box nearby. It was drenched in blood. Another picture for his little collection.

Inside the kitchen, Teruteru was blabbing something about blackouts. Kokichi told him to go into the room where the others were and started looking at the list of items. The knives in the list were all inside the metal case. The one under the table was bought by someone else, the culprit. He took a picture of the whole list and then returned back. While he was waiting for Chiaki and the others to return he reflected on the whole situation.

“I wonder what was that strange noise…” his attention focused on Ibuki.

“What noise?” he asked her.

“It was like a BIIP or maybe a PIIP, or a PIIB perhaps?” she pointed two fingers at her head like it was helping her remember.

“When did you heard that?”
“Right before the blackout, sir!” she saluted him.

He searched for something that could have made that noise and found the AC controller on the wall.

‘I see, I have a big part of this case figured out, as soon as Chiaki, Overlord and Fuyuhiko returns it's time to talk to everyone.’

Staying inside a room with a corpse and talk about how it was killed, maybe, was not the best way to end the night but that’s what they were doing anyway.

“So basically, you’re saying that the culprit hid the knife under the table in advance?” asked Mahiru.

“Not only that, the blackout was no coincidence either. The AC controlled was set to turn itself on while we were all here and three irons were plugged inside the storage room. Basically, they caused it precisely when they wanted.” he explained.

“For someone to have prepared all this…” Sonia pondered.

“Only Nagito could do it.”

Kokichi was really unhappy about this, Nagito was the first person he met on the island and he looked nice and friendly. Unfortunately, all the clues were pointing at him. Before the blackout, he was right beside the table where Byakuya was killed. There was one problem with his deduction, though. He collected his thought once again and opened his mouth to voice it when Nagito started to laugh. It was a long, maniacal laughter.

“Wonderful! You really are bright, Leader! I knew I recognized that special light inside you at first sight! Yes! You're absolutely correct! I'm the killer! I killed Byakuya!”

Kokichi was at a loss for words. Nagito looked… completely different. His eyes were a whirlpool of darkness swirling and devouring every light. Everyone started to freak out and some of them started to call for Monokuma.

“Wait, wait! I’m not so sure that he is…” he tried to stop them.

“PLEASE WAIT A MINUTE!” surprisingly it was Mikan that helped him.

“Well, what’s wrong? Let’s just hand him to Monokuma already!” Nekomaru puffed out his chest.

“No! The knife is not the murder weapon!” she yelled with a faint voice. “The murder weapon is a long, thin object. Like an ice pickle! It can’t be a knife!”

‘What? That’s the first time I’m hearing this! I was thinking about something else entirely!’

That brought complete silence in the room like someone had turned down the volume of a tv. Kokichi decided to take the situation into his hands again.

“Not only that, I have found a tablecloth inside the storage room, it had blood on it. If you think about it, if the culprit really killed Byakuya from under the table that person would have blood all over themselves. That tablecloth was used as a shield. But for it to be in the storage room… Nagito was with us in the room after the blackout, and he was clean. Only three people could have put that tablecloth in that room: Fuyuhiko, Peko and Teruteru.”

A new wave of panic spread. Nagito’s expression was normal again but when he looked at him he almost smiled, like he had somehow passed a test of some sort.
“Silence, everyone, please!” Kokichi tried to calm them all. "Chiaki, Gu—I mean Supreme Overlord of Ice, have you done what I asked? Have you found a way to enter from the outside?"

“No, we did not." Gundham raised his voice. "However! While entering from outside is, indeed, impossible entering from inside is another matter entirely!"

“I can see that you have your earring back.” Kokichi smiled.

“Are you referring to the Hell Hound Earring?” Gundham's voice was low and dangerous.

“Ah, yes, of course, the Hell Hound Earring. Can you tell me how it got in your possession again, Overlord?” he conceded readily.

“Very well, I shall. My beloved subordinates, the Four Dark Devas of Destruction, found a way to infiltrate under the floor from inside the storage room, and then the Hell Hound Earring was safely retrieved. Fear not, the Earth shall keep spin for another day.” he concluded with a smile.

“That’s a relief. Have you seen anything suspicious under there?” Kokichi asked again.

“No, nothing except a strange liquid…”

“Like this one?” Kokichi showed him the duct tape and the knife.

“Yes, indeed, I believe so.”

Now Kokichi was certain. Only one person could have committed this murder.

“Only one person was capable of leaving such a trace under the floor. Clearly, it was done in advance. Only two people had access to this building before the party. Nagito and… you, Teruteru Hanamura.”

The Ultimate Cook started sweating and blabbing nonsense.

“But wait…” Mahiru looked dubious. "Are you saying that Teruteru got under the floor during the blackout and used the glowing paint to navigate… And then he just stabbed in the dark?"

“Not exactly, since the knife under the table had the glowing paint too, he probably aimed at whoever touched the knife.”

“That would imply that he knew about Nagito’s plan in advance!” she was still not convinced. "And how did he reached the storage room in the dark anyway?"

“In the kitchen there is a portable stove, probably he used that, or a match perhaps? Still, he was the only one capable of walking around using fire. Especially since we all were inside a room with a closed door. We would have noticed anyone else with a lighter, and we would have noticed if anyone was missing from the room afterward. Teruteru was not in the room from the start, so his absence was justified. Peko, on the other hand, could not have known Nagito’s plan or have left that trail of paint, and we have Nekomaru’s testimony. The bathroom was occupied before the blackout.”

“No, nononono no you’re wrong! I didn’t do anything!” Teruteru was fully panicking.

“What about the murder weapon?” Rantaro joined in. "It should still be somewhere, right? If it’s in the kitchen… that would be a conclusive proof!"

They all stormed into the kitchen and started searching every nook and cranny all the while Teruteru blabbed incoherently. Nekomaru screamed.
“FOUND IT!”

A long and thin iron skewer was hidden inside a huge piece of meat on the bone.

“NOOOOOOOO!” Teruteru was screeching in terror and sweating profusely.

“Well, this is done.” Kokichi’s tone was really flat. "But I want an explanation, Nagito! What were you doing earlier? How could he know about your plan? Why did you try to kill Byakuya?”

Nagito smiled like he was having a great time.

“Why? Isn’t it obvious? You’re all Ultimate, you can’t run away from a challenge like this! So, I’ve simply decided to give you a hand, I would have started the killing and got all of you in the mood for confronting this situation! I sent Byakuya a letter that said that someone was going to get killed before the night ended and he decided to plan this party to keep all of us in one place. Teruteru found my plan and confronted me before the party, I had no idea that he had a plan on his own but I tried to cover for him anyway. I don’t care which light wins, if Teruteru’s hope is bigger than yours then I want to help him, of course! It turned out that it’s not, however. Your light is clearly stronger and brighter, so you all found the truth! Teruteru, I guess you have to give up now.”

“Give up?! What do you mean, give up?!" yelled the Cook.

“Yeah! It’s time to give up!” Monokuma dropped from the ceiling. He started snickering with his paws on his mouth. “Teruteru, you’ve been found guilty! Now, you will receive your punishment!”

“Wait a second,” Kokichi stopped him, "I want to know why he did what he did!”

“Oh, I’m sure he will sprout some nonsense about wanting to save Byakuya from Nagito, buuut, I’m going skip ahead and tell the truth! Teruteru wanted to kill because he wanted to go home at all costs! Am I wrong?”

“I… I had to see mom… She is sick and she is alone, waiting for me… If two years passed… Is my mom still ok?” Teruteru was crying.

“Oh Teruteru, why did you believe something as ridiculous as a memory loss!” Kokichi could not believe what he was hearing.

“ But… what if it’s true? I had to see her…”

“Seeee, little Leader?” Monokuma was having a great time. "You think that this test is ridiculous and yet, in only 48 hours, I’ve already got tons of useful data! Only because you’re strong it doesn’t mean that the others are too! Well, it doesn’t really matter because… IT’S PUNISHMENT TIME!”

What followed could only be described as a grotesque demonstration of power. Teruteru was hung from a helicopter and dropped inside an active volcano. That was it. In less than a minute Teruteru was gone forever. It didn’t feel real at all.

“Thank you all for your cooperation with the first phase of the test! Oh, I forgot to mention, this test will continue until there are only three Ultimate left! I’ll contact you again when it’s time for the second phase! Enjoy your time here and don’t worry about Byakuya’s body, I’ll dispose of it. Good night!”

With that, the bear disappeared and a long, heavy silence fell on the survivors. Until Nagito spoke again.
“Let’s take this sadness and use it to shine even brighter tomorrow!”

“You shut up, you psycho!” Kazuichi snapped at him. ”You cheated during the drawing for the cleaning duty to get pick and kill Byakuya, didn’t you?! You are just as bad as Teruteru, no, you’re worse!”

“Oh, is that what you think of me, Kazuichi?” Nagito looked a bit disappointed. ”I didn’t cheat, I just left it on my luck. You remember my talent, right?”

“Yeah, your talent is Ultimate Bullshit, I get it. Now, shut up.” Kokichi intervened, tired. ”Everyone… It’s 3 am and we are all tired. Please, I ask you to go to sleep, if you can, and meet later in the morning in the dining room. Let’s not do anything rash or potentially dangerous while we are in this state of mind. We can all talk tomorrow.”

“Words of a true Leader!” Nagito looked ecstatic again. ”No wonder you are—“

“SHUT-UP.”

They all shut themselves in their cottages. Probably no one slept that night.

After three hours Kokichi emerged again from his cottage and in front of his mailbox was Rantaro.

“Hi Kokichi, I suppose that ‘good morning’ is really out of place right now. Have you slept?” he smiled a little.

“No, have you?” Kokichi sighed.

“No, but you need to look positive or the others are gonna panic even further.”

“Do you think that this would be a good moment for me to take the leadership?” he put his hands in his pockets.

“Maybe not, but you know that you have to do it, right? It’s time for your talent to shine.” Rantaro offered an apologetic look.

“Yeah, I just hope I’m not going to shine for less than 48 hours, like Byakuya.”

“Maybe I can try and protect you? Though I’m not sure I’m the best person for that, maybe you should ask Nekomaru.”

“Is this the Big Brother talking?” Kokichi raised an eyebrow.

“You may be a Leader, but even a Leader needs a Big Brother sometimes.”

They smiled at each other. It was nice to have an ally.

Chapter End Notes

Some chapters will be longer others shorter, I’m sorry but I don’t really plan the length before, only the stopping point. Anyway, you may notice, in the future chapters, that the Past Side storyline will progress much faster than the Present one. It’s not a mistake or anything, there is a very
solid reason for that.

Was this case comprehensible? Did I make any mistakes? I'm not talking about things that I have omitted, I'm talking about the logic behind everything. If something is wrong I'll try to fix it!
The morning after Akamatsu-chan’s execution was really quiet. They met in the dining room for breakfast like always but no one was talking, everyone looked gloomy and drained of energy. Akamatsu-chan’s last moments were on everyone’s mind. Kokichi was a bit lost. When he had taken place in his podium he had felt confident, lucid, almost detached from the whole situation. He was not expecting the rush of emotion that her motive and death caused him. He had been right about her, and yet he had been completely wrong. She really was a foolish optimist and yet she took in her hands to save them all. Contrary to Momota-chan’s belief, she actually accepted to dirty her own hands for them. Kokichi felt a surge of admiration for her. He had not been strong enough to do the same. He was not going to make the same mistake. He would take things into his hands next time.

The last two people to arrive were Momota-chan and Saihara-chan. Saihara-chan looked different.

‘Oh, his hat! He got rid of it!’

Kokichi was surprised to see him at all. After the trial, he looked completely devastated. He could not blame him honestly. She had been really crafty in her scheme. All the trust that he felt for her become a backstab, yet for some reason his faith in others did not look shaken all that much.

“You got rid of that emo hat! Is this ‘cause Akamatsu-chan died or whatever?” he poked at him. Okay, maybe he felt a little vengeful.

They continued to eat breakfast while Gonta revealed that he found some writing outside, hidden in the grass.

‘Horse a?’

“Wow Gonta, I knew that you would be useful the moment I have seen you!” he sent some flattery at him.

He had to make him show the exact position of that writing later, he thought he had searched the outside fairly well, he didn’t want another hidden door situation. When he saw Gonta falling for his trick so easily he decided to send some warning too, there was no need for another Amami-chan situation either.

“Be careful, if you keep being so gullible you may get killed, you know?” he put a finger on his lips. Everyone immediately started ganging up on him.

“It’s the K word banned?” he faked surprise. “It’s not very reasonable and it’s exactly this kinda things that let Monokuma play you all like fiddles.”

That blasted bear chose that exact moment to show up.

“Look alive, my dear students! I have a prize for you!” he shouted enthusiastically throwing an ocarina, a hexagonal crank, a red orb and an ancient passport on the table. “Explore the school to discover their use! Bye!”
Kokichi really wanted to take them for himself but he knew that they would throw a tantrum if he did. Momota-chan, who had apparently taken the leadership now, decide to give the items to Saihara-chan.

“I guess I’m okay with Saihara-chan!” he said even if no one was waiting for his opinion.

He surely was the most suited for this task. It was unlikely that he would do something devious after Akamatsu-chan’s death. When they finished eating the wonderful breakfast that Toujo-chan made they all got to the second floor, to take a look at the dragon statue. That was the most obvious location for the red orb, after all. Kokichi was pretty sure he knew where the others were located as well but he would limit himself to follow Saihara-chan from the shadows. Their intuition proved correct as the statue cracked to dust and opened a secret passage in the wall, in a very flashy and definitely impossible way. Kokichi was seriously starting to wonder if he had been thrown into a video game.

They all charged inside the new part of the school and dispersed to explore at their own pace. Kokichi followed Saihara-chan as discretely as possible. First, he entered Toujo-chan’s Lab, it was Victorian styled and full of cleaning supplies. Kokichi didn’t wait for them to finish their conversation and got on ahead by himself. He reached the balcony that was visible from the entrance hall and beyond that was another Lab and a red treasure chest.

A red treasure chest.

‘What the hell… are we really inside a video game?’

Saihara-chan and Yonaga-chan opened it and inside was a strange looking flashlight. Kokichi felt strangely drawn to that thing. It was not the first time he had seen one, he was sure, but he couldn’t remember where. Yonaga-chan took the flashlight away, he was not particularly happy with that but he kept following Saihara-chan. The Lab was Gonta’s and it was full of bug cages. Next to the Lab door were another set of stairs, Kokichi ran ahead to the third floor. Right after reaching the third floor he found a door that screamed Tennis Lab, he was about to take a peek inside when he saw Harukawa-chan looking around suspiciously like she was hiding something. He followed her to the other side of the floor, passing through another section of the balcony that was covered in blue plastic sheets. She entered a strange red door and closed it behind her. He stood there unsure of what to do for a few seconds before noticing an even stranger door. It was all pixel-like.

‘Okay, now we are starting to exaggerate a little with all these video game references…’

Saihara-chan knocked on the red door Harukawa-chan disappeared through. The girl opened the door after a moment of hesitation and started to threat Saihara-chan to scare him away. She clearly didn’t want him there, probably she didn’t want anyone in there.

“Saihara-chan!” Kokichi intervened. "It’s not good to be so pushy with a girl!"

“See, because of you an annoying brat showed up.” she sighed.

“See Saihara-chan!” he cut him off before Saihara-chan could answer. "An annoying brat showed up because of you!"

Before leaving Saihara-chan again he decided to throw a little hint at him.

“I wonder why she doesn’t want anyone inside…”

‘So that’s her Lab, hmm… Her secret is about her talent, then. Well, she never fooled me, she is a Child Caregiver as much as I’m a Horoscope Writer. I’ll come back tonight and take a look inside.’
He followed Saihara-chan for the rest of the day. First, he found the place where the ancient passport was to be placed and revealed the Magician Lab. Inside were a lot of potentially dangerous items, like swords and even a guillotine. He would have preferred a lock on that door. Then, outside the building, Saihara-chan opened a path to get inside the pool using the ocarina next to the stone with the musical notes. The pool didn’t look special, yet Monokuma appeared and added a rule.

-No swimming during nighttime-

Kokichi was extremely perplexed, what purpose did a rule like that served? The probability of someone drowning during the night was risible. The last object was placed next to the castle gate and a path to a casino and a hotel was opened. The casino looked worthy of a thorough investigation, so he decided to check the hotel first, except the door was looked and there was no other entrance. Outside the door was a sign.

-Buy a Love Key to gain entrance during the night!-

Another perplexing thing.

‘A Love Key? Why does everything look incredibly fishy? Is this a Love Hotel? Why do we need a place like this?! I mean, doing that kinda stuff is already a bit of a stretch in this situation, but why can’t someone just do it inside his private room? What are those stupid kidnappers thinking?’

He decided to try and get one of these Love Key after he finished investigate everything. He searched for Gonta and asked him the position of the mysterious writing ‘horse a’. The Entomologist brought him to the left side of the boiler room, the place where the entrance to the underground tunnel was. The writing was on a flat stone, half covered by the grass. Kokichi was sure that he already saw that stone and there was nothing on it. So it was either another captive or Monokuma who wrote it after the trial.

“When did you find this?” he asked him.

“When Gonta was searching for bugs!” he answered enthusiastically. "Gonta thought he see a tiny bug flying in this direction, but then Gonta lost it…”

“A tiny bug you say? How good is your eyesight?”

“Gonta has very good eyesight! But must be mistaken…” he was looking unsure.

Kokichi filled that information in his brain for later. Later that day he went to the gym where everyone was already gathered. Gonta had informed him that Yonaga-chan wanted to talk to all of them. It turned out it was about that flashlight that she and Saihara-chan found earlier. He felt a chill down his spine for some reason.

“Ah, I see that you have found my little present!” the damned robot-bear again. “That is a flashback light! Use it, it’ll restore part of your lost memories!”

After a consultation, they did indeed use it and after Yonaga-chan clicked the switch it was like the world was warping under his feet, in the blinding light he felt a lightning of pain that forced him to close his eyes. Images were forming behind his eyelid.

The Ultimate Hunt.

The others started to confirm their new memories but Kokichi was more interested in another thing.

Rantaro mentioned this to me.
Kokichi could not understand why but this information felt extremely crucial. After dinner he shut himself inside his room, waiting for the darkness. He counted how many times he heard a door closing, when he reached the number eleven he opened his door cautiously. Some people were still not in their room but it was already past midnight, he couldn’t waste this much time and he wanted to sleep at least a couple hours. He was impatient more than anything to discover Harukawa-chan’s secret so the first place he went was her Lab. He reached for the handle of the door but his instinct saved him from a fatal mistake, he jumped back. There was a really faint light coming out of the fissure between the door and the floor.

‘Shit, she is still inside, the room is lighted up!’

He could enter and see what she was hiding, by the time she would notice his presence he would have already seen the room. Unfortunately, making enemy wasn’t part of the plan for the immediate future. He had to give up and went to take a look at the Tennis Lab. The tennis court was not particularly interesting but the shower room really was.

‘Interesting, not only they created Labs for all of us, but they even took the time to put up such an elaborate and sick joke. Hoshi-chan is constantly talking about his time in prison and they made his shower room prison-themed. What nice people kidnapped us! Now, I guess that the information about Hoshi-chan's crime is out in the open, so it’s not like it’s surprising that they know… What bothers me is, why all this effort? How much money were spent just to keep us here? To what end, they haven’t asked us to do anything particular that only us Ultimate could do. This almost looks like… a horrible set up for a tv show or a movie.’

That thought sent a powerful chill down his spine.

‘No, no way that’s just too ridiculous! What kind of people kidnap kids to make a tv show where they kill each other? Why not use actors? And there are no cameras anywhere! The filming quality of static cameras is just not enough for showing anyway. Yeah, this is too stupid, can’t be.’

He tried to investigate the Inventor Lab, for the third time, but once again Iruma-chan was still inside. Defeated, Kokichi returned to his room and slept.

That night he dreamed of Monokuma, the bear was telling him something about a psychological experiment with 15 Ultimate involved and a traitor. Then Rantaro appeared and told him that he could trust him. And that Monokuma didn’t need a camera to film them.
Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Exploring the world

Inside the restaurant, the Ultimates didn’t look well rested at all.

“Where is Mr. Bullshit?” Kokichi asked.

“Nagito you mean? No idea.” answered Mahiru.

Kokichi registered with the corner of his eye Kazuichi and Nekomaru exchanging a furtive glance. He would need to talk to them separately later. He steeled himself and stood as tall as possible for someone his height.

“I know that we are all scared and tired. That we all want to go home and forget everything. I can’t promise you anything like that. You may think that I want to take Byakuya’s spot and become the new Leader of the group. You would be wrong, one thing that no one really understands about my Ultimate title is that it doesn’t make me a Leader. I don’t want that spot because it’s my title, I want you to choose me to stand in that spot. So, no, I’m not the Leader. But I am your friend. Why don’t we start with that? I won’t give you any order or tell you what to do, in exchange can I ask you all to talk with someone if you’re scared or something is bothering you? It doesn’t have to be me. Let’s not make another Teruteru. To keep all our feelings to ourselves and explode is what Monokuma wants.”

Sonia clapped her hands.

“I think that this is a marvelous idea! The first thing that we should do is to create a safety net! Let’s not keep our thoughts to ourselves, let’s share the pains and burdens!”

“Miss Sonia is absolutely right! But… is this really enough to keep another murder from happening?” Kazuichi scratched his head dubious.

Kokichi could see doubt in the other people’s faces, Hiyoko was smirking with sarcasm. He stated the truth flat out in the open.

“No, it’s not. I’m sure that Monokuma is preparing another nefarious plan to make something bad happens. But what would you rather do? Nothing? Find an escape route all by yourself and leave everyone behind? I won’t say something so cheesy as ‘we need to trust each other’, so I’ll say something a lot more realistic. We should form small groups of at least two people and switch members frequently. If I can make a suggestion I would say to form them during breakfast, switch them during lunch and then get all together to draw the conclusion of the day during dinner.”

“This does actually… sound very reasonable.” admitted Mahiru reluctantly.

Everyone started to agree, at first a bit hesitantly but then the enthusiasm flowed through all of them until everyone felt completely cheered up. Nekomaru slapped him on the back almost sending him flat on the ground.
“Wow, kid! You know your stuff!”

Chiaki placed a big piece of paper on the table and started drawing a plan for the day. She acted like a guild master, listening to her guild members preferences and assigning positions. Kokichi took Fuyuhiko as a partner.

“Why him?” asked Kazuichi perplexed.

“Because he is the most uncooperative,” he answered, "I’d rather take the problem children myself that force someone to deal with him.”

Needlessly to say, Fuyuhiko was not very pleased. After they finished eating they went their separate way. Kokichi was walking beside a sulky Fuyuhiko when he spotted something that definitely was not there yesterday.

“Where does this bridge come from?”

They crossed it and on the other side were three buildings. A drugstore, a diner and a beach house. The thin line of land where they stood was too small to be called an island. Kokichi started to think that maybe there really was something wrong in his head.

‘This was not here yesterday! No way I would not notice something like this!’

Inside the drugstore, Mikan and Ibuki were making a mess, between Mikan’s clumsiness and Ibuki’s loud personality. Kokichi quickly left them alone and entered the diner.

“Fuyuhiko,” he tried talking to him, "I know that you’re a Yakuza and all that, but can’t you try and cooperate with us for a while? I’m not asking you to do anything, just roll with the flow and stuff.”

“Roll with the flow and stuff”, very eloquent dumbass.” he showed his fist. "Now listen well, being a Yakuza has nothing to do with it, I’m gonna put everyone in their places with my own power, not using my family name. I need to prove everyone that I can make it alone!” Fuyuhiko lowered his head, a very uncharacteristic gloom in his face. “I won’t be able to face my family and my sister ever again if I lose here…”

Kokichi didn’t push any further, hopefully, the situation would be solved before he thought of doing anything stupid. Inside the beach house, they found Kazuichi and Nekomaru whispering to each other.

“Well, I really wanted to talk to you two. What are you hiding? I know that’s related to Mr. Bullshit disappearance.” he spoke to them and they jumped a little, startled.

“Look man… It’s already difficult as it is… We don’t need that psycho running around freely…” answered Kazuichi with a pleading voice.

“Basically, we chained him inside the abandoned building.” Nekomaru deadpanned.

“I see, good call.” Kokichi matched Nekomaru's tone.

Kazuichi, who was looking at his feet with guilt, immediately raised his head.

“Seriously?”

“Yeppers, very good call!” he smiled. "At dinner let the others know too, though, we don’t need more worries. Knowing that he is there, chained, will probably make them feel better.”
“I was absolutely sure you would start talking about the importance of forgiveness, or trust, or humanity or whatever.” Kazuichi was very surprised.

“Have you taken me for a spiritual counselor? You would be surprised to know just how merciless I truly am.” His voice lowered a little.

“Okaaay man, now you’re scaring me a little…” Kazuichi chuckled nervously.

The beach house had a walk-in closet to store surfboards, a refrigerator full of multicolor drinks and a very little shower room with a window close to the ceiling. On the shower room door was a sign signaling the absence of water. Kokichi tried the sprinkler and there was indeed no water at all.

-DING DONG-

-Please assemble in front of the statue!-

Kokichi, Kazuichi, Nekomaru and a reluctant Fuyuhiko slowly made their way to the statue. A message from Monokuma was never a good sign. Everyone was already there, except for Nagito, obviously. Next to the statue was a red and green arcade machine.

“Everyone! You shouldn’t listen to Monokuma!” the white rabbit that he found on the beach and then disappeared somewhere jumped from behind the arcade. “I’m Monomi! Don’t listen to him, he is trying to disrupt the project! You have to fight him!”

“Now, now my dear little sister! Don’t confuse my test subjects with your babbling!”

It was Monokuma's turn to jump into view. Both animals were standing on the statue pedestal, glaring at each other.

“Little sister? So you two are in this together! I knew that you weren’t to be trusted!” Mahiru pointed a finger at Monomi, the others agreed with her. Monomi started crying.

“No! No! You’re getting it all wrong! I’m not even his little sister! You, stop saying confusing stuff! I’m from Future Foundation and—“

“Yeah! The horrible organization that kidnaps Ultimate and forces them into cruel human experiments!” Monokuma was looking very smug.

“Stop it!! Please believe me! You don’t have to believe anything that this bear says!” Monomi yelled throwing her arms in the air.

“Anywayyyyy, let’s move on from this booooring conversation and announce the next test!” Monokuma's yell completely overcame hers.

Everyone protested as loudly as possible but an even louder music started playing from the arcade machine which came to life shooting rays of light into the evening sky. The cacophony of noise and blinding light effectively silenced them.

“Geez! Are you a bunch of little kids? Can’t you even wait until the end of the explanation before starting to bawling?” Monokuma shouted angrily. “As I was saying… This game is the next test! Inside I have hidden a special memory that you have forgotten! You may discover something very special about the lovely Future Foundation! Ah, but I don’t want to ruin the surprise! Good gaming, everyone!”

“No! Don’t play that game!” Monomi was panicking.
“Ah, you come with me Monomi, I need to discipline you, my beloved little sister!” Monokuma grabbed Monomi’s long ear and jumped into the sky like a rocket.

The arcade music stopped playing and the lights turned down to a normal level of brightness. Rantaro was the first one to speak.

“Clearly, we are not playing, agreed?”

Everyone quietly nodded then they started reporting the day activities and Kazuichi and Nekomaru revealed Nagito’s current situation. As expected no one had anything in contrary. The conversation didn’t last very long, everyone was clearly downcast by the new test. They were not expecting it so soon. Even if they agreed not to play it didn’t mean anything. They could place a guard in front of the machine but none of them really trusted the others enough and even placing multiple guards was not going to solve the problem indefinitely.

‘Should we break it? I don’t think this would be a good idea, Monokuma will surely make us pay if we try something like this.’

They returned to their cottages in silence and shut themselves inside. Kokichi waited until later into the night and stood guard himself behind some bushes near the machine. At some point, during the night, he could see Rantaro’s blond hair behind a tree nearby. Kokichi smiled a little.

Around four in the morning he returned to his cottage and slept. At eight he got up feeling extremely hopeless but determined to make everyone survive another day. Inside the restaurant was only Mahiru.

“Oh, good timing, I… could you do me a favor?”

Kokichi felt a bit hesitant seeing how she was dodging the subject and her eyes were not meeting his.

“What kind?”

“Oh, it’s just… Could you bring Nagito his breakfast? I… have something to do.” she pushed the tray she was holding to him without waiting for an answer and ran away.

Kokichi looked at the food resigned, there was a slice of toast, a glass of milk and some orange jam. After letting out a sigh he made his way to the abandoned building. Right outside he met Fuyuhiko who was holding a strange envelope.

“What’s that?” he asked him.

Fuyuhiko jumped a bit, startled, he covered the envelope with his arms and started to walk away.

“None of your business, you jackass!”

Kokichi was starting to get a bad vibe. Was his guard duty during the night not enough? Sure, there were timeframes where someone could have played it but it wasn’t like he could stay there all day. Inside the ex-murder scene Nagito was lying on the floor, sleeping with his hands chained behind his back and his legs tied up. Maybe Kazuichi and Nekomaru overdid it a bit.

“Oi.” he called him.

The white hair shook a bit when he woke up, his eyes immediately fixed on him. Kokichi kept his expression as neutral as possible.
“Ah, Leader! I’m so happy to see you!” Nagito was cheerful as usual.

“It annoys me greatly that you are the first one to call me that.”

“I apologize, of course, you would not be happy with this piece of trash! You shine too brightly!” he immediately conceded the point.

“Whatever, your breakfast.” Kokichi was annoyed already.

“Did Mahiru give this to you? For some reason she ran away earlier, I probably appealed her. So, have you played the game yet?” he said like he was making casual conversation.

“Did you do something to her?” Kokichi asked with suspicion.

“Me? Like what? You know very well that the expert on human psychology is you, not me. I can’t manipulate people like you do!” Nagito was smiling pleasantly.

Kokichi knew that letting him get on his nerves was a bad idea, but he could not stop himself from acting childish. He took the slice of bread out of the plate, with a very deliberate slow motion, then he put it down on the side of the tray. He could feel Nagito’s eyes on him as he lifted the glass of milk and spilled it all inside the plate. Then, still very slowly, he picked up the bread again and holding it from a corner he drowned it into the spilled milk until it was pretty soaked. Taking a step forward he lifted the damp bread high, meeting Nagito’s eye. Then he dropped it, right on his face. It made a satisfying splash sound.

“I’m not a merciful person.”

Nagito laughed, the sound muffled by the bread and milk.

“Thanks for the meal, Leader.”

Kokichi left the room without looking back. Outside was Rantaro, clearly waiting for him.

“Brought breakfast to our little captive? He is pretty crafty, you know?” he said cheerfully. "I brought him dinner last night and he tried to convince me to play the game. We should be more careful.”

“I see, Love-me-chan, I’m afraid we already have a problem. If I’m correct Mahiru is playing the game right now.” Kokichi frowned.

“It’s not only her, I’ve spoken to Chiaki earlier and she told me that she played it this morning without even try to hide it.” he sighed crossing his arms.

“At this point, it’s best if we do too. If it’s innocuous we will let everyone play and solve the problem this way. Letting only some people keep the knowledge is not a good idea.”

“Heeyy!” Kazuichi was running towards them waving his hand and smiling. “Hey, hey! I have super special secret information! A meeting is going to take place tomorrow at the diner! We are going too, right?”

“What kind of meeting, what are you talking about?” asked Kokichi confused.

“It’s top secret, you only need to know that all the girls will be there! It’s gonna be amazing, I’m telling ya!” his eyes were sparkling.

Kokichi and Rantaro look at each other for a moment before nod. Kazuichi was overjoyed.
“Awesome! Let’s meet tomorrow morning at the diner, this way we will be there in advance and look completely casual! Perfect! Bye!”

Kazuichi ran away again, smiling brightly.

“This… is something about naked girls, isn’t it?”

Rantaro laughed at his resigned expression. Well, Kazuichi was in for a little surprise.

Chapter End Notes

The game content is completely different, as I said this plot is not D2. Only the murders are almost the same.
The morning after the nightmare, yes *nightmare*, he decided to go immediately to the casino and take a look at the prizes. You never know where you can find something useful. Only that he didn’t find something useful, he did find someone useless.

“Oi, dickhead, let me guess, you’ve come here to get the Love Key ha?!”

“Aww, Iruma-chan! You totally spoiled my fun! I was going to propose to you later, see you joyful reaction at my little flirt, but NOPE. You just had to go and make the first move!” he put his hands behind his head and smiled broadly.

“Yeah, right. You sure would have loved a couple of licks to your sorry little thing down there, wouldn’t you?” she put her hands on her hips.

“Not as much as you would have loved to give them to me, that’s for sure. Well, too bad, I’m gonna ask someone else then.” he retorted easily.

“Sure, whatever, I can recognize a virgin on sight, and you are one of them. I don’t even need to use my invention to see it.” she laughed obnoxiously.

The word invention caught Kokichi’s attention. How had he not thought about this sooner? He wanted to slap himself for this.

“Neee, Iruma-chan!” he spoke like a little child. “Show me that invention of yours, I’m sure that it can tell that I had a lot of sex in my life!”

“Keh! We will see about that!”

They left the casino together and went to her Lab, finally, he could get a look inside. It looked really creepy actually, but kinda interesting too. It was full of strange, dangerous looking tools, and in the middle there was a bed, like the one you would expect in a mad scientist's lab who does human experiments. She took out a strange gun-looking thingy and pointed at him.

“Keh! Figured you would be a fucking virgin!” she puffed her chest proudly.

“Are you sure that thing isn’t broken? And how do I know that it’s the real thing, or that you are even capable of creating something like that?” He was virgin, sure, but that was irrelevant right now, he only wanted to poke at her pride and make her work for him. “Let’s see… I’ll offer you a way to prove your worth to me, if you can then I guess I’ll have to accept that that thing is real. Create something that can disable electronic devices.”

“Why on Earth I should do something like that?! That sound boring as shit!” she immediately started complaining.

“Oh? Even if I tell you that we can use it on Kiiboy and see if he really has a dick somewhere? You want to take a look at him, don’t you?” he poke at her even harder.

He didn’t care about that whatsoever but it was a stupid gag that he was constantly spinning just to
annoy him. Kokichi was still sure that something was up with him, he was just too big of an anomaly. And Iruma-chan’s interest in dicks would be a good way to make her cooperate. The girl did, in fact, start sweating and blushing, with her gross face filled with lust.

“Ahh, that’s… not that bad of an idea, actually…”

Kokichi spent the rest of the morning with her, exchanging insults and planning the best way to make a weapon that disabled electronic machines. The real use that Kokichi was planning for it was to disable the Exisals and maybe even the electric traps inside the underground tunnel. He didn’t explain it to the inventor, he was afraid that she would betray them all and escape by herself once the idea was planted in her mind. Around noon he left her, his stomach was giving him painful hunger pangs, he had not eaten breakfast after all. Inside the dining room was Toujo-chan.

“Ouma-san, you didn’t eat breakfast, right? I must remind you of the importance of having regular meals for you cerebral activity and body health. Not to mention that a certain degree of regularity will improve your fatigue level and quality of life overall. Furthermore---“

“Yeah, yeah, mom. Can I have my lunch now?” he cut her off with a lazy tone.

Toujo-chan's expression tightened with a slight hint of irritation. While the maid inquired about his lunch preferences and started to place the dishes in front of him on the table, Kokichi decided to test her a bit.

“Hey, hey, mom, do you know how to fight?”

She didn’t look pleased with the question.

“I can, on a reasonable level, protect my employer from danger.”

“So, you already fought before right?” he insisted. "What if your employer asks you to hit someone? Would you do it?"

“No, I would not, unless there is a serious impending danger.” she was doing her best to not show how displeased she was. "I can prioritize my employer safety over someone else only in a very extreme situation. Normally, I simply suggest an alternative solution to violence.”

‘I see, this answer my question: would she kill someone if anyone asks her? But it’ not very satisfying either, what does ‘extreme situation’ means exactly? In a fight between two people with weapons would she get involved? In this situation we are in, I don’t think that a possibility that normally is statistically low is that impossible. Knowing the limit of morally gray is important here.’

After eating, Kokichi asked for Toujo-chan’s cooperation. He asked her to fetch a plastic whiteboard that he had seen inside the warehouse and a box of multicolor markers. Then he made her bring everything to his room, in the meantime, he printed a picture of all the captives, dead ones included. Once alone, inside his room, he spread the pictures on his bed, reflecting. First, he took Amami-chan’s and Akamatsu-chan’s pictures and placed them next to each other with an arrow connecting them, on the left side of the board. Killer and victim.

Then he wrote ‘List of Suspects’ in the middle of the whiteboard and placed all the other pictures under it. He didn’t believe in dreams, Amami-chan telling him that there was a traitor should not change anything. Yet it did. He had no proof whatsoever. It was illogical. Yet Kokichi was sure. Between Kiibo and the absence of cameras the more he thought about it the more it made sense. Someone was infiltrated, hiding among them.

The problem was: it was Kiibo or someone besides him?

He needed to learn more about all of them. He could not exclude any of them at that moment.
Suddenly he got hit by a thought. In the heat of the trial he had forgotten all about it. Where had the pictures of Amami-chan’s murder ended up? Saihara-chan passed them around to show the flash trick. **Who took them last and made them disappear?** Kokichi wanted to punch himself for that giant mistake. Luckily he had copies of them saved inside his Monopad.

Interesting though, was there something important in those pictures?

After printing three sets of copies, just in case, he spent the rest of the evening inside the casino. The Love Key was really expensive in term of casino coins. Instead of trusting his luck with the slot machines he steadily accumulated coins with a game of fishing. He had no idea why but the word ‘luck’ made his mouth go sour.

The next morning he woke up with a start because an unexpected announcement was playing at high volume from the monitor in his room.

-DING DONG-

-Good day! I’ve left a little present in your rooms, enjoy!-

Kokichi jumped out of his bed immediately. He looked the door and yes, the pile of rubbish on the chair, the same that he dragged in front of the door every night, was still where it was supposed to be. Untouched.

No one should have been able to enter his room, yet the diabolic bear found a way. If laws of physic were not to be trusted then what was Kokichi supposed to trust?

On the little table in the middle of the room there was a colorful tablet, similar to the Monopad, but slightly different. Kokichi took it with a grimace, he really had a bad feeling about this. He sat on his bed as a video, narrated in the bear’s voice, stated to play. The video showed him, Kokichi, surrounded by ten people dressed like him. According to Monokuma they were his loyal goons, part of a group called DICE and he was the Leader. The last section showed those ten people inside a cage of some sort, all of them looked wounded. A motive video, that’s what it was. Kill to see your loved ones again who are in danger.

Kokichi watched the video three times. He did not know any of those ten people.

Yet he did. He knew all their names even.

Yet he had no idea who they were.

‘Why my memory contains ten names of ten people I don’t know?’

Kokichi felt a wave of fear settle inside his heart.

‘What’s wrong with my memories? If I can’t even trust myself then…’

He jumped to his feet, shaking away everything, refusing to go in any deeper inside those despairing thoughts, he opened his drawer and thrown the Motive Video inside. He did not want to see it ever again. It was for the best anyway.

‘The others must have received one too, this is dangerous.’

Normally he would have reached the dining room at a deliberately slow pace but his heart was still heavy and he did not care as much about appearance. Inside they were already discussing it, Kokichi listened carefully and discovered something that confused him greatly. Apparently, the others had
received someone else's Motive Video, not their own. Why was he the only one to receive his? Once all of them were gathered inside Momota-chan and some of the others decided to not show each other's Motive Video and to keep a secret who had who's.

Kokichi was disheartened. How could they not realize the enormous mistake that this was bound to be? How could they not see the possibility of blackmail? Knowing that your loved ones were in danger was already bad enough, not knowing who had access to such weakness was even worse! They could blab about trust all they want but not all of them were on the same page, some of them clearly were not trusting at all. Even if they had had their own was still necessary for the whole group’s sake to share all of them, to localize and neutralize the most dangerous ones. Kokichi was pretty sure that people like Shinguji had no qualm whatsoever in killing. Who knows what kind of crazy trap the bear had spread?

Kokichi was feeling more and more disappointed by the others’ intelligence level. Clearly, he had to take things into his hands.

“Well, I don’t think we should force each other to cooperate.” he said in a neutral voice. "That being said, Gonta, come with me, you promised to help me formulate a plan!"

“Hey you! Stop dragging Gonta around with your lies!” Momota-chan yelled at him.

“I’m totally not! He totally promised! Now let’s go!” he cheerfully strode out of the dining room. Luckily, Gonta was exactly the kind of person that was easily dragged around by his lies. He dragged him inside his Entomologist Lab on the second floor and after a few confused questions, he finally settled and listened to him. Kokichi started spreading his web from very far away.

“Hey, Gonta, I’ve heard that cicadas live for years underground and then live only a summer out in the sun, is it true?”

“Kokichi loves bugs?!” Gonta's eyes started to shine. "Cicadas are a very common species of bug in summertime so everyone knows them but many people find them noisy and ugly… Do you want me to explain their life cycle?! Gonta is so glad that someone here loves bugs!”

Kokichi was by no means an expert on bugs, or a bugs lover, but he had a good memory and he had picked up some trivia here and there. It helped him greatly to survive the next few hours where Gonta talked nonstop about them. If that had been done by anyone but Gonta he would have surely thrown some lies and sarcastic comments already, but out of all the people here Gonta was the only one Kokichi almost trusted. Sure, he could not tell him any secrets or anything important, but he was certain that the big, muscular guy didn’t mean any harm to anyone, ever. So, from a superior intelligence point of view, Gonta was like a useful underlying, the kind of company you could easily get used to.

“Hey Gonta, you’re really an expert, aren’t you?” he nodded at him two times. "So, I think that you are the best person for this, yes, only you can do it!"

“Do what, Kokichi? Gonta doesn’t understand…” he looked at him with confusion.

“You know, all the others dislike bugs! Maybe they never had someone as amazing as you explain to them exactly how great bugs are! Why don’t we prepare a party… yes, a party here in your Lab, so you can show them how beautiful all your bugs are?” he was finally reaching his real point.

Gonta eyes filled with joy as he started to praise Kokichi’s idea and plan the ‘party’. The door opened so silently that Kokichi didn’t notice until the sound of someone clearing his trough made
him turn. Saihara-chan was standing in the door frame looking out of place and extremely unsure of himself.

“Saihara-chan! Why is my dear Detective here?” he was genuinely surprised.

Saihara-chan looked around for a bit, like he was searching for proof of some crime, then he looked at him still uncomfortable.

“Can I speak with you for a bit, Ouma-kun?” he fidgeted a little.

Kokichi exchanged a glance with Gonta, he didn’t seem to mind at all, and all the tactical part was already done, only the actual plan was left. Kokichi was sure that Gonta would not change his mind after just some minutes of his absence.

“Suuure, I would love to spend some time with my favorite Detective!” He swung his legs and jumped down of the wooden stool he was seated with a smile. He followed Saihara-chan out of the Lab and both of them seated on the stairs nearby. “What do you want to talk about?”

Kokichi rested his face into his hand and made his best innocent expression.

“Were you serious? When you said that we should not cooperate and all that?” Saihara-chan asked him.

Straight to the point, Kokichi was kinda impressed. He was growing faster than he expected.

“Saihara-chan, I’m an Ultimate Supreme Leader of evil.” he smiled just a little. “I have gone through a lot of experiences in my life, I know how these kinds of thing go. You can talk about friendship and trust all you want, someone will betray you in the end. So maybe! Maybe you should betray first!”

“But this is just a lie, isn’t it? And I’m not convinced about your secret evil organization either.” he was looking at him seriously.

“My secret organization runs the world behind the scene! I must balance all those politics, and economists… all those people in the palm of my hand! It’s such a heavy work! You should definitely be grateful to me, I maintain the world peace!”

“Oh yeah?” Saihara-chan sighed. “How did you managed to reach such difficult position?”

“I killed my parents and my older brother to inherit it, obviously!” he snickered.

“You what?!” Saihara-chan started to panic a bit, Kokichi did his signature laugh.

“Nishishi! It’s a lie! ‘cause I’m a liar.”

“I thought so.” he sighed again. “Anyway, I’m serious, what are you planning? I understand that you don’t want to trust us, but going and exchange the Motive Videos without telling us is not a reasonable thing to do either.”

“Don’t worry Saihara-chan! I don’t plan on exchanging them in secret at all! I was only planning a little party, for later this evening, with my friend Gonta! But I have a totally secret plan in store! If you wanna know I guess you should pay more attention to me!”

Kokichi got up and placed a finger on his lips. Saihara-chan looked at him from below with an expression of slight confusion and concern.
“See you tonight, my beloved Detective.”

He left him and returned inside Gonta’s Lab closing the door softly.

He wondered if Saihara-chan got his little hint about world pace and balancing people. Probably not.

No one ever got his hints.
Kokichi and Rantaro played the game.

It had a horrible graphic, a terrible plot and basically no interactive features, you could just read some text. Still, it wasn’t like they were playing it for fun. The plot was the real problem. If Monokuma was to be believed it was a real event. The game followed a girl, called sloppily Girl A, as she reached her workplace for her first day of a new job. Her workplace was a huge building covered in greenery in the center of a little island. In the scene appeared other 15 people, boys and girls of a similar age, and the narration lazily described two years of peaceful cooperation between these people. They were working on a project called Talent Cultivation. After that the game suddenly jumped on a different scene, Girl A was dead on the floor and another girl was taking a picture of the body. The screen changed again, it became black and a red text was slowly scrolling up.

-Girl A’s killer was never found-

-Another person took her place inside the project, sent by Future Foundation-

-That new person deleted all the memories of Girl A from everyone’s mind-

-The traitor, trying to blend in the group is still out there, between them-

Then the screen went black once again, a GAME CLEAR appeared. Under it was written 'down five'. As soon as the joyful music of endgame stopped, Monokuma appeared once again.

“Congratulation! Unfortunately, you are too late, the prize has already been given to the first person who cleared it! Bye!” he yelled.

The bear disappeared jumping high into the sky and the machine started giving the staff roll. The cast was composed of all their last names, only that there were two Kuzuryu. Fuyuhiko had mentioned a little sister to him.

“Damn.”

“What’s wrong?” asked him Rantaro.

“I think I know who is the girl that got killed.” he answered with a frown.

“Really?”

“Yeah, but I’m not going to say anything, there is no proof whatsoever that this thing is even based on real events. I don’t want to cause a panic.”

They returned to the hotel in silence and then separated after deciding to suspend the guard duty. It was pretty useless at this point and the only person who should not play the game was Fuyuhiko, if the others played they could probably do the math but it wasn’t like it concerned them directly after all. Kokichi tried to talk to Fuyuhiko but he didn’t answer the door. He found Gundham on the
“Good evening Overlord. Something new to report?”

“It’s a clear and serene night, on a night like this one the spirit of the dead whisper in my ears. Byakuya’s and Teruteru’s spirits are crossing the line that will send them to the next level of existence.” he was looking at the horizon.

“I see, Overlord, you think that Byakuya forgave Teruteru?” he asked standing by his side.

“Byakuya had the soul of a Leader, his actions spoke louder than his words. The way he tried to protect us all during that night was truly worthy of his name. Teruteru’s weak heart brought misfortune on him but I don’t think he would take personal offense.”

“ Seems like Byakuya managed to gain you respect. I hope I will too, someday.” he smiled a little.

“This too may be the will of causality.”

“Good night Overlord.” he bowed to him just a little bit.

Kokichi entered his cottage still with a little smile on his face. He really liked Gundham, his convoluted personality may sound tiresome but he, more than anyone, knew that what was important were not the words but the intent behind them. Gundham was a good person with strong morals and ideals. The night passed quickly and uneventfully, that morning Kokichi and Rantaro met Kazuichi inside the diner. The guy was extremely excited and greeted them with a huge smile.

“Here you are! So, today meeting! You won’t believe what I discovered. The girls had planned to go together to the beach! To the beach! You know what that means?!”

“You wanna see them in their swimsuit, right?” Rantaro had a condescending smile.

“C’mom man! Don’t make that face! Don’t you wanna see Miss Sonia’s beautiful body inside a sexy swimsuit? Actually, no, look at another girl, I wanna look at Miss Sonia all by myself!” he pointed at them.

“Why did you choose to tell us this?” asked Kokichi.

“Well, I mean…” he looked a little embarrassed. "If I’m here alone they will likely send me away, right? Instead, if there are other people they will probably invite us to join! I chose you two because who else? Fuyuhiko, no way. Nekomaru and Gundham? No way… You two have friendly faces and trustworthy talents! I mean, a Leader and a Big Brother! They will feel reassured by your presence, right? Here, I have a swimsuit for the both of you, go change in the bathroom of the diner this way we will match! I’m wearing the same model right now.” he gave them a thumb up.

Rantaro sent a glance, with barely concealed disgust, at the mimetic Speedos, Kokichi smiled with anticipation.

“Suuure, but are you really sure that you want to match with me? That may give the girls the wrong idea you know?” he rested his face on his hands, looking innocent.

“Wrong idea? What do you mean?” Kazuichi was confused.

“I mean that I play for the other team.”

“What?”
“I swing the other direction.”

“Eh?”

“Kazuichi. I like a cute or handsome guy better than a pair of boobs.”

“WHAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAT??”

Rantaro started laughing loudly, not looking surprised at all and Kokichi's smile got wider.

“So, you know, the girls may get the wrong idea here." he shrugged. "And just so you know, you’re not that bad but you’re not my type. Just saying. You on the other hand, Love-me-chan, are definitely my type, wanna be my boyfriend?” he winked at him.

Rantaro was wiping the corner of his eye, still laughing a bit.

“Sorry but you are not my type!”

“Buuu, Love-me-chan buuu. My cute little heart is broken!” he pouted.

“Sure, I can totally see the pieces.”

Kokichi and Rantaro passed the time chatting and exchanging jokes while Kazuichi was recovering from the shock until the girls arrived. Mikan and Ibuki arrived, fully clothed for Kazuichi displeasure, Chiaki instead had a cute white bikini on.

“What are you boys doing here??” asked Ibuki.

Kazuichi snapped out of the trance he had fallen into after seeing Chiaki and started to blabber incoherently.

“What a coincidence! I mean, me and my friends were, ah, yeah, right, MY FRIENDS, they are my friends, not something else got it?! Anyway… what a coincidence! I never thought---“

“We were thinking about having lunch together, you girls have plans?” Rantaro smoothly recovered the situation.

Rantaro and Kokichi, with their friendly faces and trustworthy talents, were able to convince the girls to spend the day together. They talked about beach games and food waiting for the other girls to appear. Hiyoko passed by running but she didn’t stop by the diner, later Peko arrived completed drenched in water wearing a black bikini. Last to arrive was Sonia, she was fully covered thanks to a wetsuit for surfing. Kazuichi was stunned for a bit, but then he started showering her with compliments. Kokichi was starting to think that maybe there really was a good future waiting for them.

“Mahiru is late… Maybe we should search for her?” proposed Mikan, worried.

They separated into small groups and he and Kazuichi went to the beach house. Kokichi’s happiness died quickly as a loud announcement started to play through all the island.

-DING DONG-

-A body has been discovered! Please assemble at the beach house!-

Mahiru’s dead body was seated against a door, blood covering a portion of her face. The others arrived one after the other until only Nagito was missing. Monokuma showed up like always.
“Hello, my dear test subjects! Would you look at this! You kids really can’t wait to start dirtying your hands, don’t you? Here is the Monokuma File N2! Enjoy this beautiful tropical day!”

Once again Kokichi had to bury all his feelings and stay rational. He pulled up his hood. The Monokuma File only stated that Mahiru was killed by a blow to the head, clearly with that metal bat covered in blood that was nearby. There were bloody drag marks on the floor suggesting that she was dragged to her sitting position against the door. Nothing else seems closely related to her death.

“Mikan, can I ask you to take a look at her? You were really useful last time.” he asked the Nurse.

“S-sure, I-I can try…”

Kokichi entered the walk-in closet and almost squashed a gummy candy on the floor. He picked it up and took a photo, just in case. Nothing else caught his eyes so he went inside the shower room. There was nothing relevant inside, the water still was not running and the window was too high up to be used by a single person. The window gave him a suspect though. He quickly left the room and addressed Kazuichi.

“Do you remember if there were any footprints in front of the door we came from before founding the body?”

“Footprints? Why is that important?” he scratched his head.

“Because if I’m correct the culprit dragged Mahiru’s body in front of the door to create a lock room mystery.” Kokichi crossed his arms, reflecting.

“You would be incorrect,” Peko intervened, “I have taken a little swim before reuniting with all of you in the diner and there was a set of footprints in the sand. They were small, I think I would be able to recognize them if we try comparing.”

“I see, only a set of footprint, the culprit’s probably. That’s what you’re hinting?” he confirmed with her.

“If you drag the body from the inside there is no other way out, right?” she reasoned.

Kokichi fell deep in thought. Why drag her body and then carelessly leave a trail of footprints? Maybe the culprit hoped that they would be erased by them walking around before discovering the body. Still, a little too careless. Leaving that mystery aside he considered what he knew. The victim was Mahiru and the culprit was probably Fuyuhiko. The arcade game was the motive. The game clearly depicted Fuyuhiko’s sister death and a girl with a camera taking pictures. Fuyuhiko probably thought that Mahiru was his sister’s killer.

“Hey, hey.” Chiaki got his attention by pulling the sleeve of his purple hoodie. “Have you played the game?”

“Yes, I have, I know the plot.”

“Then you know that Fuyuhiko probably mistook Mahiru for her sister’s killer.” she nodded. “I think that we should tell him the real killer.”

“What? How did you figure it out?” that had caught him off guard.

Chiaki tilted her head a little.

“Have you really cleared the game? Even the bonus scene? Down five.”
Kokichi was stunned, now that she mentioned it, it looked extremely obvious.

“No, I didn’t.” he wanted to kick himself for this mistake.

“Then you better go, I’ll keep an eye on the situation here. Hurry.”

After nodding at her he ran full speed until he reached the arcade. Someone else was already playing.

“Oh, good afternoon Leader! I was just taking a look, but if you want I can go away.”

Chapter End Notes

Forget the shower room window, no ninja is allowed in my story :')
I've always found the sword trick to be a bit of a stretch.
I should have checked how exactly the footprints were not erased by Kazuichi and the others when they reached the beach house, but I'm too lazy lol, so just take for granted that there are no footprints available, only Peko's testimony.
Present Side

A true mystery

The night came sooner than Kokichi would have liked.

The ‘Insects Meet and Greet’ party, as Gonta called it, was about to start. He observed, faking disinterest, as the Entomologist brought one by one almost all the captives. Shirogane-chan, Shinguji, Chabashira-chan and Kiibo were protesting loudly at him, immediately putting the blame for everything on him without proof. Then Gonta appeared again with a guilty expression and he gently lowered Saihara-chan’s body to the floor. Kokichi jumped down from the stool and hurried to his side with a little squeeze of fear in his heart.

‘He didn’t kill him, did he?!’

“Gonta is so sorry!” the big guy was apologizing. "Gonta could not slow down in time and hit Shuichi! Gonta even failed to capture Ryoma!"

Kokichi sighed and told him to bring the others then he squatted down hitching closer to Saihara-chan’s face and started to poke him.

“Wake uupp! Saihara-chan! It’s morning! Well, no, it’s night, but wake up all the same! C’mon!”

He ignored the other badmouthing him behind his back and poked some more. The Detective’s eyes started to twitch a little then they opened completely and stared into Kokichi’s. They stared at each other for a moment, the Detective didn’t look capable of recognizing what he was looking at.

“Are you wondering,” Kokichi whispered to him, "who am I? Where am I? Well, you’re definitely Saihara Shuichi and this is… I guess hell!”

Saihara-chan finally came back to his senses and almost knocked him in the head while trying to sit up. Kokichi jumped back and laughed a little. Gonta came back carrying Yumeno-chan and Angie-chan who were in the gym preparing for some magic show or something.

“The others?” he asked him.

“Gonta thought he saw Miu but…” he hesitated a little. "Gonta got weird feeling and had to run away. Kurumi was in gym, Gonta could not catch her.”

“Well, I guess at least one of them is worth the Ultimate title." Kokichi sighed. "I guess this will have to work even if there are fewer people than I hoped. Gonta! Start your lesson, I have an errand to take care of, I’ll be back by nighttime!”

He ran out of the Lab and made his way to the dormitory as fast as possible. Sure, he would have preferred if all of them were gathered, but half was enough. They would spread the videos further later. At least he was sure that Saihara-chan would want to keep things fair for everyone. Before he could reach the entrance hall, however, he was stopped by Toujo-chan. The Maid scolded him all over again for his eating habits and general conduct. Kokichi tried to shake her off for almost an hour before finally, she gave up. Once outside he saw a naked Iruma-chan wandering around.

‘What the f--- whatever.’
There were limits to things he did want to know.

He knocked on every door first, making sure that no one was inside and then slowly picked the lock of all of them. He collected and watched every single Motive Video. Figured that they would keep them inside their rooms, such an obvious place. Well, he did leave his inside his room too... but that was a minor detail. They were mostly boring. An Aikido master, a female Cosplayer, a master magician, Gonta’s family, Saihara-chan’s uncle, Momota-chan’s grandparents, some cultists, Iruma-chan’s dog and a scientist. Then there were three really interesting. Shinguji’s showed a grave with a picture of a girl. Kokichi had no idea how that was supposed to be a motive, the message attached didn’t make any sense either. Something about the need to remember and honor the dead. Harukawa-chan had Hoshi-chan’s. His was empty. Literally. Inside Hoshi-chan’s room was Harukawa-chan’s video. Now, that was interesting.

-Harukawa Maki, Ultimate Assassin-

Kokichi would have laughed, if only his throat wasn’t painfully clutched. Of all the times to be right this time he’d rather being wrong. This was worse than he expected. And they were calling him a liar. Kokichi would have laughed, really.

He searched Toujo-chan’s room three times and the Motive Video simply was not there. What was even worse was the fact that the Motive missing was indeed hers. Kokichi understood. His Motive and Toujo-chan’s were supposed to be switched but for some reason, they were not.

He collected all of them in his arms and made his way back to the Lab. He noticed Hoshi-chan walking around just in time, he dropped the videos in a dark corner full of weeds.

“What are you doing around, kid?” the small guy asked him.

“Ah, my good friend Hoshi-chan! What are you doing around?” Kokichi put his hands behind his back, faking innocence.

Hoshi-chan chewed a bit into his fake cig and closed his eyes.

“Let’s cut straight to the chase, do you know who has my Motive Video?”

“What if I do?” he lowered his voice to almost a whisper.

“I knew it, you’re just the kind of person to completely disregard other people’s opinion and do whatever you want.” he took his cig away from his lips. "I knew that you had already watched them. So, where is mine?”

‘Right in the bushes down the corner… No, seriously. I don’t think that’s a good idea to tell him, his thing is empty… He already has that ‘who care if I live’ attitude…”

“If you want you can come to our little party, Insects Meet and Greet or something. I think that you can see it there.” he offered.

“So that’s what Gonta was doing?” he sighed deeply and put his cig on his lips again. "Just tell me who has mine, I don’t want to bother anyone else, if they don’t want to watch theirs I’m cool with that.”

“Well too bad, if you don’t want to come I guess you’re not going to see it at all! Good night Hoshi-chan!” he waved at him.

‘Since I have it, it’s impossible for you to see it even if you ask the correct person. I would have let...
you watch it together with the others during the party, this way I would be sure that you would not instantly commit suicide or some stupid stuff like that. Too bad Hoshi-chan. Guess you’ll have to stay mad at me and not much else.’

Kokichi pretended to walk away and waited until he was sure that Hoshi-chan had disappeared from view, then he went back and collected the Videos in his arms again. He ran at full speed realizing just how much time he did waste, the others were probably at their limits with Gonta and bugs. Indeed they were, they were half dead even. Gonta was not that great at understanding the concept of restraining.

Kokichi plans for the night got destroyed, however. As soon as he asked Gonta to stop tormenting them Chabashira-chan knocked the Videos out of his arms and fled with them, the others follow her and ran away. He tried to ask Gonta to capture all of them again but the Entomologist had finally caught on his intention to share the Videos and instead trapped him inside, lecturing him.

Kokichi, later in his dorm room, admitted that his plan had not been fool-proof, but still, he was a bit annoyed. Now the Motive Videos were who knows where and in possession of who knows who. He had only gained the advantage of knowing personally what was in them. Tomorrow he needed to talk to Hoshi-chan. And search Toujo-chan’s Video. And make a new plan. Feeling extremely tired he fell asleep as soon as he threw himself on the bed, lying on his stomach, still fully clothed as usual.

He had probably underestimated the amount of stress he was carrying because he slept through the morning announcement and woke up only when a second one started to play.

-DING DONG-
-A body has been discovered! Please, assemble at the gym!-

Kokichi jumped out of bed and hurried to the scene of the crime. A scene that was composed of a tank, a pack of piranhas and some very bloody water.

‘Seriously? Was someone eaten by piranhas? Inside a water tank? People, what kind of mind do you have? What kind of sick, twisted personality pushed you to something so extreme? How does something like this even happens!’

“Hey Gonta! Throw Kiiboy and break the tank!” he ordered him.

“Got it!”

The Entomologist, with the help of Chabashira-chan, broke the tank and water came out flooding through the whole gym. The bear came out and handed the Monokuma Fine N2. The victim was Hoshi Ryoma, apparently drowned and eaten by piranhas.

This time Kokichi had no clue of what had happened, he was sleeping and didn’t even have an alibi. In the first murder he had not needed it but in this case, he was sure that someone would try and blame him. He discretely spied on Saihara-chan’s investigation. This time, maybe, he would have even tried to participate but Momota-chan started to yap around the Detective and Kokichi didn’t particularly fancied a headache.

Putting together bits of information he more or less understood the dynamics. The mage, Yumeno-chan, jumped inside the tank full of water that was on the floor, then Yonaga-chan closed the curtains. Gonta jumped on stage, looked inside the water tank from above and didn’t see anyone. Then the tank full of piranhas that was suspended above the other one opened and the piranhas
poured out. When the curtains opened Hoshi-chan was already in there and he had been eaten.

Gonta’s testimony was important to establish that Hoshi-chan was not inside the bottom tank, he appeared there together with the piranhas which meant that he was in the top tank all along. The question of how he was not eaten before was easily answered by the presence of the square glass panel that was now on the floor. It was clearly used to divide the top tank into two parts. The real problem was when Hoshi-chan was killed and placed in the top tank.

He had met Hoshi-chan on the way to the Lab, during nighttime, and he was clearly very much alive. So, he was killed after nighttime. New problem: entering the gym during nighttime was prohibited by the rules. Yumeno-chan’s and Yonaga-chan’s testimonies added a layer of complexity. Apparently, they were in front of the gym during the morning, waiting for the gym to open. Granted, they could be in this together, but Kokichi was not inclined to believe that this was so easily solved.

How did someone place him inside that tank during the night or the morning without entering the gym? He left the others behind and went to the pool. The window connecting the pool and the gym was open, he could see Saihara-chan examining it.

‘Was Hoshi-chan’s body placed through the window? But how did someone reached a place that high up?’

Another thing inside the pool caught his eyes. A big rubber inner tube was floating on the water with a rope attached. Kokichi smiled.

‘Now, this is a mystery alright.’
Kokichi sighed looking at Nagito’s smile.

“Why are you free? Why are you here?”

“Oh, apparently Monokuma wanted me to participate.” Nagito said completely casually. “Since I’m not updated with the events I thought I’d look at this first. I’m almost done.”

Kokichi just waited for him to reach the end of the game and then when he was about to tell him about the down five Nagito just went ahead and did it without a second thought. Kokichi would never admit it to a single soul but seeing Nagito reaching the answer before him stung a lot.

The game presented a scene that was supposed to be a flashback. Girl A was working on her computer when Monokuma appeared and hit her with his claws on the back. The girl died right after. Another black screen with red text appeared.

-Surprise! The killer was actually me! Monokuma!-

-A beautiful story right?- 

“Are-you-kidding-me?” Kokichi was starting to get a throbbing headache.

“Wow, this game sure is poor taste. Not only it’s rushed and boring, but the mystery is not even worthy of the name. How where we supposed to know that Monokuma was a character in the game?” his voice was still light and cheerful.

Video game criticism aside, Kokichi was getting a clearer picture. Basically, Monokuma was trying to imply that they went to this island on their own free will, then he appeared, killed Girl A, infiltrated someone from his group, Future Foundation, inside the group, wiped their memories and then forced them into this experiment. All looked very silly, actually, he could have just said all this out loud without all this convoluted game-thingy. Which meant that he was only making fun of them. Creating the game to intentionally lead to misunderstanding… If this had not been a bonus scene, Fuyuhiko would have never made the mistake of thinking that Mahiru killed his sister. She didn’t need to die at all and Fuyuhiko had only Monokuma to blame. Said damn thing appeared once again.

“Ohh, you cleared the game 100%! I’m impressed! I would give you a prize but…” Monokuma was enjoying this too much for Kokichi’s taste.

“Just tell us what the first prize was!” he yelled at him.

“I can do something better! The prize is currently inside Mahiru’s cottage! Why don’t you go and see for yourself?” he was definitely enjoying himself.

They did exactly that. Kokichi was not happy that Nagito was his company but he endured it anyway, now it was really not the time and it was better to keep an eye on him anyway. Inside the
cottage was a picture, a real picture of Fuyuhiko’s sister. The picture that was taken by Mahiru inside the game. So the prize was a proof that the game was real. No wonder Fuyuhiko killed her considering his personality. There was a letter too.

-Meet me in the beach house, you’re going to tell me all that you did to my little sister!-

Kokichi sighed. This murder was already solved and he really didn’t like it. On the way back to the beach house Nagito asked for details on the murder, Kokichi decided that it would be better to answer now than to waste time later so he gave him a summary of the evidence.

“A gummy candy? Hiyoko’s you mean?” he asked him at the end of the summary.

That effectively threw Kokichi off balance.

‘The gummy, the small footprints… Is Fuyuhiko trying to blame Hiyoko? But how did Hiyoko’s footprints ended up there? Assuming that they really were… would Peko lie for Fuyuhiko?’

Inside the beach house, an animated discussion was going on.

“Confess Hiyoko! It was you, the footprints were yours and we saw you running by the diner!” Kazuichi was pointing a finger at her.

Kokichi had forgotten that part, then Hiyoko really had been at the beach house. He didn’t join the discussion immediately, trying to think. He had another proof that would condemn her in his pocket, but was that the right thing to do? He had no proof against Fuyuhiko, except for the motive. His eyes got attracted by a trash can full of empty mineral water bottles. A flash of inspiration hit him.

“Hey Mikan, did Mahiru’s blood landed on the culprit?”

Everyone got quiet and stared at the Nurse. She fidgeted a little before answering.

“Y-yeah, the blood that spilled from the wound was… and the culprit dragged her against the door… so I think that they should be full of blood drops…”

Kokichi took the situation in his hands and addressed Hiyoko.

“It’s pretty evident that you were here at some point. Can you tell us what happened? I don’t think you’re the culprit. There is no water in the shower room, the culprit used the mineral water inside these plastic bottles to clean themselves. You were dry when we saw you running outside the diner. Even if you were to kill Mahiru while naked you would still have to wash your hair.”

“Why would I kill someone while naked?! And this is not possible anyway, because… I can’t get dressed by myself…” Everyone looked at her in disbelief and she started crying. “Weeee! You meanies! It’s true! I had to ask Mahiru to help me bathe! Tying a kimono is much more difficult than you think!”

“Okay, okay, just tell us what happened.” he tried to make her stop her tantrum.

“I… Mahiru was acting strange, so I followed her here… But someone grabbed me from behind and then I’ve lost consciousness… When I woke up I was inside the closet and Mahiru was already dead! I panicked and run away! I’m sorry, Mahiru!” she sobbed a little.

“All right, I think that this clears things a bit.” Kokichi summarized once again. “The culprit used some kind of drugs from the drugstore, killed Mahiru, dragged Hiyoko inside the closet and then waited for her to leave the footprints on the sand. Basically, they tried to pin the blame on her.”
Then he realized something that completely blew away all his certainties. Fuyuhiko could not be the culprit. The only way out from the beach house was to walk in front of the diner, yet no one saw him passing through there after Hiyoko. Another person, however, was at the diner, soaked wet.

‘But… why? She doesn’t have any relation with Mahiru or the arcade game…’

Everyone was looking at him expectantly. They had probably recognized his expression as one of realization.

“You know who it is, right Kokichi?” Rantaro was looking at him straight in the eyes.

He was trying to communicate a feeling of support, Kokichi nodded.

“The culprit is Peko Pekoyama.”

Everyone started talking at once, Fuyuhiko louder than everyone else.

“Oh yeah?! And what’s your proof, you ass!”

“She was the only one to show up at the diner wet. Not Hiyoko, nor anyone else, her. And it’s interesting the fact that she is the one and only person that remembers Hiyoko’s footprints. It’s impossible to determine if that was true or not but consider this: if Hiyoko is not the culprit then how did the true culprit escape? Not from the door Mahiru was sitting against, not from the window in the bathroom, they would need an accomplice, and even in that case, someone would still be left behind in here. The only possibility is that there were two sets of footprints from the start, so Peko’s testimony is a lie. Peko created this semi-locked room mystery to make sure that only Hiyoko would be a suspect. Removing her from the list, only the person that has lied remains, not to mention the water on her body.”

“You’re making this up! She was swimming! And even then, the killer would still be Hiyoko, don’t tell me you believe so easily something as stupid as ‘I can’t get dressed by myself’! It’s clearly a lie!”

Fuyuhiko was not retroceding in the slightest from his position.

Kokichi didn’t know what the relationship between him and Peko was but at this point, it hardly mattered anymore. Fuyuhiko was clearly trying to defend her, while she was remaining silent. Peko killed on his behalf, for some reason. Nagito intervened.

“Well, there is an easy way to determine whatever she is lying or not. Why don’t we throw her in the ocean and then bring her a new kimono? I think that she would want to get dressed eventually. Even if she can put up a performance and fake her incapacity, the night around here gets pretty chill, you know? I don’t think she would want to stay in a wet kimono all night.”

All the girls started to scream at Nagito lack of tact until Peko stepped forward.

“There won’t be any need. I’m confessing my crime. It’s true, I did it.”

“Peko! What are you doing?!” Fuyuhiko started to panic. “You did nothing, it’s not true… it’s—no, I—I did it!”

Kokichi could see the utter confusion on everyone’s faces except for Nagito, Chiaki and Rantaro.

“Fuyuhiko, I played the game.” it was time to clear some misunderstanding. "Mahiru was not your sister’s killer. Your sister was killed by Monokuma so he had an excuse to infiltrate someone. Assuming that the stuff inside the game is truthful. In any case, tell me, do you really think that a killer would take a picture of the person they killed? She probably was collecting proof for an
investigation, just like we are doing right now. I know that the person with the motive to do this kill was you. Did you make a deal with Peko? You probably realized that we would suspect you if we had played the game. So you asked Peko to do it and place the blame on Hiyoko? This way even if we voted for you it would still be wrong. Peko had no connection to the motive whatsoever, you probably thought that this was enough to cover for her.”

“No, you’re wrong,” Peko intervened, “I was only obeying Young Master's orders. I’m Young Master's tool. If he wants to kill is only fitting that I would be the one to do it.”

“Peko! Enough already!” Fuyuhiko shouted at her.

Kokichi observed both Peko and Fuyuhiko, the strange current of feeling that was coursing through them as they looked at each other silently and stubbornly.

“Please, can you tell me what is really your relationship?” he asked them.

“As I said I’m Young Master-” started Peko.

“ENOUGH! Peko… Me and Peko are childhood friends. She was raised in our household… and then given to me as a bodyguard.” Fuyuhiko looked sad.

“AHHH, I’m bored of this sappy stuff!!” Monokuma made his theatric entrance interrupting the conversation. “The culprit for this case is indeed Peko Pekoyama! And now, IT’S PUNISHMENT TIME!”

“WAIT! Please wait! I… I didn’t order you to do this, Peko! Why have you taken the bat? Why have you dealt the killing blow? I-I don’t want you to die, you’re not my tool, you… you’ve known me since we were children! Why can’t you understand my feelings!!?” the Yakuza was on the verge of tears.

“I’m sorry Young Master, I could not let you kill her, no matter what, I want to protect you.” Peko smiled sadly at him and Fuyuhiko’s face started to contort in pain.

“No! Peko, wait! Don’t go! I-I need you! Don’t leave me!”

Fuyuhiko screamed as tears started to flow down his face, he extended a hand to grab Peko's, to never let her get away from him.

The damn bear grabbed them both and lifted them in the air, they landed on the cliff at the end of the little island. Mechanical puppets appeared and Peko unsheathed her sword. She valorously fought to protect Fuyuhiko but one of the puppets placed itself between the two and Peko slashed it, along with the boy behind it.

Kokichi and the other watched as Peko hugged the injured body of the boy and then got pierced by a multitude of swords. Kokichi’s heart almost broke at the scene and he could hear the others scream and cry beside him. He watched the blood of the two childhood friends mixing together on the ground. That image, he was sure, it would never stop haunt his nightmares.

“No! I won’t allow this! Only Peko was the culprit for this case, Fuyuhiko should not be punished!” said a female voice.

The white rabbit, Monomi, appeared behind them then shook a thing that looked like a magic stick in the air. An ambulance appeared out of nowhere and Fuyuhiko’s blood-covered body flew inside. Then the ambulance door was closed and the vehicle disappeared beyond the horizon.
“Well, I don’t really care. If you want to keep the little Yakuza keep him. One more, one less… See you all for the next motive, you expendable beings!” with an evil laughter, Monokuma jumped out of view.

Even with his emotions completely all over the place Kokichi still noted somewhere inside his brain that most things that had happened were physically impossible. There were moments where Kokichi thought that this was not reality. This was one of those moments where he really hoped that everything was just a nightmare.

A hand rested on his shoulder and he heard Rantaro whispering in his ear.

“You have done a great job, now rest for a bit, I’m taking care of the others since I wasn’t able to help earlier.”

Kokichi gratefully took his help, his tension fading a bit from his shoulders and a weight he didn’t even know he had faded from his stomach. *He survived and helped everyone else survive too. He did a good job. Like a true Leader.*

Before anyone could see his mask crack he slipped away from the beach house and shut himself inside his cottage. Kokichi laid on his stomach with his face pressed on the pillow for a long while before he could get any sleep.

The following morning no one was waiting for him outside his door. For some reason, Kokichi was expecting Rantaro to be there, like after the first murder. He started to feel a little anxious, maybe he should have stayed behind after all. Maybe his friends were all scared and depressed and he just escaped to have some time for himself. He hurried to the restaurant trying and failing to keep a confident and consistent pace.

Everyone was having breakfast loudly on the table, nearby there was a strange assembly of black candles and flowers with some photos attached. They turned their faces toward him.

“Yo, Leader, do you like it? Hiyoko did it. It’s a bit, ah,” Kazuichi hesitated a little, “artistically discussible but it’s a memorial for Mahiru!”

“Have some breakfast, Leader! You need some proteins in that lithe body of yours!” Nekomaru was waving his arm at him.

“Hey, hey what do you mean ‘artistically discussible’?! It’s a masterpiece! Ah, good morning Leader, I guess…” said Hiyoko with a badly concealed smirk.

“Yo, yo, yo! Look alive, your pressure looks really low today, Leader!” Ibuki was making ugly faces at him.

“D-do you want me to check your temperature, Leader? Y-you sure you’re not sick?” Mikan was fidgeting as usual.

“Have a cup of tea to warm you up, Leader.” Sonia was lightly bowing in his direction.

“Let’s eat, we have some planning for the day to do. Leader, I’ll select the groups again today.” Chiaki looked already focused on the future.

“Hump. Looks like you were held back in the dream world by a demon that feeds on sleep, you have to be more careful, my fellow Overlord.” Gundham was petting his hamsters.

“Here, take your seat beside me, Leader.” Rantaro nodded with a smile.
Kokichi was speechless, stunned, a feeling of happiness with a hint of embarrassment engulfing his heart. He was supposed to be used to be called like this, yet for some reason he felt a huge sense of accomplishment. Like his long-lived dream had finally been fulfilled. Like he was finally complete.

He smiled and nodded.

“After breakfast, I’m giving all of you a nickname. It’s a fair deal right?”

Chapter End Notes

Please, tell me if I made any mistake in the logical process, I'll try to fix it.
Do you like how Kokichi’s and Rantaro’s relationships with the others are developing?
Do you feel like they are actually part of the cast or did I made a mistake?
I want some opinions :)}
Fighting for someone

‘How could an inner tube and a rope be used to bring a dead body from down here through the window? Maybe the killer hanged it somewhere and used the tube as a lifter? But in that case, the culprit could not place the body inside the tank. They needed a way to be up there with the body.’

He scanned the area carefully and his eyes landed on another window, one of the few without barbered wire. If he remembered correctly that was Hoshi-chan’s shower room. He had a new place to investigate now. On the way, he met Saihara-chan that was going to the pool to investigate it himself with Momota-chan.

“Ah, I need to ask you some questions, Ouma-kun.” he called up to him.

“Sure, Saihara-chan,” he dismissed him quickly, "but why don’t we meet later in Yumeno-chan’s Lab? I’m sure that you want to take a look at her stuff, right?”

Without waiting for his answer he walked away and reached the third floor where Hoshi-chan’s Lab was located. Inside the shower room where some handcuffs, the same kind of the one that Hoshi-chan was wearing when he was eaten, the window and a large, deep sink. There were showers with huge padlocks too but that didn’t seem really relevant. He looked out of the window and sure enough, there was the pool and the gym window.

‘Would someone really be that crazy to create a ropeway through the two window, using the inner tube to transport the body? Not only the body, probably the killer themselves rid it as well. Then once they reached the gym window they placed the body inside… It could work… But it’s stupidly crazy. Who would do such a thing?’

He took another look inside the shower room, he needed some kind of proof. Surely the culprit took the handcuff from there but maybe this was the real crime scene too. He noticed some scraps on the sink. Hoshi-chan’s cause of death was drowning. The dots were already connected in his brain.

Kokichi made his way to the dormitory to steal Hoshi-chan’s Motive Video, just in case it was needed and was surprised to find that it was indeed its own. He probably exchanged them with Harukawa-chan during the night. Then he went inside Yumeno-chan’s Lab and waited for Saihara-chan to show up. He could investigate the trick that the Magician used but it wasn’t really worth his time. Saihara-chan would probably figure it out for him anyway. What Saihara-chan wanted to confirm with him were alibis. He asked him about Toujo-chan and Iruma-chan and of course about himself. Kokichi’s mind was already two steps ahead. Since Hoshi-chan was killed during the night no one had a reliable alibi, on the other hand only someone that helped Yumeno-chan setting up the tank could have placed the square glass panel inside. The tank had been set up before nighttime, so anyone inside the Inset Meet and Greet was excused. Which left only Momota-chan and Toujo-chan as suspects. Harukawa-chan didn’t help, she spent all night in her Lab as usual. Kokichi knew exactly what she was guarding now.

-DING DONG-
Kokichi, Saihara-chan and Momota-chan walked together to the shrine. Saihara-chan looked lost in thought, a good sign, while Momota-chan looked scatterbrained as usual. Kokichi was secretly considering the fact that if Momota-chan was the culprit then it was already two of Saihara-chan’s best friend that killed. And ironically they were both the ones that talked about friendship and trust. For a brief moment, Kokichi almost wanted Momota-chan to be the killer, he wanted Saihara-chan to taste the pain of betrayal fully, to stop hiding behind the word trust, to understand him a little better.

But it was only a moment and then he regretted it. No matter how stupid Momota-chan was to hope for someone’s death was a terrible sin and one that Momota-chan did not deserve if he was innocent.

Once again reunited with the others they rode the elevator and entered the trial ground. He took position inside his podium, the one right in front of Saihara-chan’s. He felt a hint of mischief growing inside him and decided to use it to speed up the process.

“Yumeno-chan is the culprit!”

They immediately started to argue in their usual, noisy manner. Kokichi seated back and waited for Saihara-chan to reveal the trick behind the water tank, then he used Gonta’s testimony to prove that Hoshi-chan was inside the top tank. Kokichi helped only a little bit, he was not interested in this part of the trial since he already had the murder trick figured out. Then they started to talk about the alibis, they presumed that Hoshi-chan was killed before nighttime and proceeded to use the Insect Meet and Greet as proof of alibis. Kokichi knew that they were kinda right, but for the wrong reason, still he did not correct them, maybe the process could be sped up even further, after all these alibis really were determinant. They reached exactly the same conclusion that he did, the suspect were Momota-chan, Toujo-chan and Harukawa-chan. Toujo-chan used him, Kokichi, to help her case, truthfully she had lectured him for a long period of time, but he knew that that little time frame was not enough to take her down the suspect list.

They reached an impasse. They didn’t have a proof that pointed at either Momota-chan or Harukawa-chan. Kokichi took the situation in his hands, it was possibly not really pertinent but he really wanted to know just how far she would take her lie.

“Let’s do something more fun! Let’s have the two suspects argue against each other! If you know that you’re not the culprit then you know that the other person is! Convince us! Work harder to prove your innocence!”

“Wouldn’t they just pass the blame back and forth?” Shirogane-chan looked doubtful.

“You’re all afraid to point the finger… So you hide behind the word trust.” he answered. ”If you want to expose a liar, you have to corner them psychologically, only then they will reveal their true selves, hiding behind a layer of deceit!”

The others looked at each other uncomfortably, like he was being difficult on purpose. All of them, to a certain degree, were liars. Yumeno-chan was deluding herself and pretending to delude the others. Yonaga-chan was lying about divine punishment to get the others to do what she wanted. Chabashira-chan was denying reality by deluding herself with things like Yumeno-chan's magic. Momota-chan was deluding himself too, voluntarily or not, he had heard him babbling something stupid about being a pirate with Saihara-chan. Toujo-chan was lying about the real degree of selfless devotion she constantly talked about. Shinguji was a very elaborate lie, from start to bottom. Iruma-chan was not even subtle about her lies. Shirogane-chan was hiding her real level of intelligence behind a façade. Gonta and Kiibo were more difficult to define, as he had no way of knowing if they backstories were true or not. Saihara-chan too, sometimes, was hiding behind lies to protect his insecurities or to avoid having to face something he didn’t want to see.
What they were refusing to admit was simple. Being a liar is not a bad thing per se. There were many ways a person could lie. Some of them were even good lies, lies told with good intention, lies to make a person happy, lie to avoid a worse outcome. They should just admit that pretend to have never lied and held the high moral ground with him was really hypocritical.

Harukawa-chan and her fake talent, looking at him like he was garbage... It made him feel extremely vengeful.

“Nothing to say? Well, I guess I will give you the first topic of discussion. TA-DA! The Motive Video! The one that was inside Hoshi-chan’s room! You know why I brought this up? Because this Video originally was given to one of those two people! They secretly exchanged them! So take a guess, everyone! Who had Hoshi-chan’s Motive Video originally?”

“It must be... Harukawa-san. Because I had Momota-kun’s Video... He could not exchange it with Hoshi-kun.” Saihara-chan had finally caught up.

“Ding-ding-ding! The Detective is right!” he yelled obnoxiously. "Since you had Momota-chan's it was easily solved with the process of elimination! Sooo... Harukawa-chan... want to give us some explanation? When did you saw Hoshi-chan?”

Finally, she explained the exchange that took place during nighttime, but she left out any information about her own Video or her talent. Kokichi was really starting to desire to uncover all her lies right here and there. His feelings for her were starting to sway towards hate really fast.

That turn of events thrown all of them off balance, they started again from square one. At first some of them called her a liar, which was ironic, really, but then Momota-chan started one of his trust-friendship-love-hope speeches. With Saihara-chan’s testimony, that sounded terribly like a lie in Kokichi's ears, they all decided to trust her and moved on with the case. Kokichi helped a little but let Saihara-chan do all the heavy thinking, he really had no intention of letting everyone know exactly how intelligent he was. Once they reached the conclusion that the murder took place inside Hoshi-chan’s shower room and then the body was moved using a ropeway they were on the same page Kokichi was from the very beginning.

Saihara-chan accused Toujo-chan. That caught Kokichi interest, what made him so sure?

“If you are the culprit, Toujo-chan, then the final clue finally falls into place,” he showed a little piece of cloth, “this... is part of your black glove, isn’t it?”

Saihara-chan explained that he found it inside the pool, near the inner tube. Kokichi didn’t remember if he had seen that piece of cloth in the pool but he was sure that even if he did he would not have given it any importance. Trust Saihara-chan to find another piece of evidence that he was too blind to see. Just like the hidden door in the library. Kokichi did not pay attention to the last part of the trial, he voted for Toujo-chan feeling empty and a bit irritated by the whole situation. He had not been able to see her Motive Video, maybe he could have prevented this if he had been able to.

After the Voting Time, Toujo-chan admitted her crime and after some insistence coming from the others, she decided to share her Motive Video. Kokichi watched, feeling more and more disbelief as the Video played. Apparently, Toujo-chan was Japan’s Prime Minister behind the scene. She wanted to escape because the bear told her inside her Video that a tragedy was befalling her citizens. Kokichi would have even believed it, hadn’t his own Motive Video clearly showed him that there was the possibility of fake memories.

“I didn’t remember it until I watched the Video” was the only thing that Kokichi needed to hear from Toujo-chan’s mouth.
“Why have you decided to target Hoshi-kun specifically?” asked Saihara-chan, still taken aback.

“Because he was easy to kill.” was the flat answer.

While the others commented with skepticism Kokichi shifted his weight a little, uncomfortable. This was his fault too, wasn’t it? Hoshi-chan watched his Video alone and broke. He knew, he could have prevented this too. He slipped up a little.

“He watched his Motive Video and decided that his life was not worth the trouble, am I right?”

“How do you know what his Video shows?” Saihara-chan caught his mistake immediately.

“Let’s not worry about that,” Kokichi changed the subject immediately, “more importantly, let’s watch his Motive Video!”

Once again the empty Motive played and everyone fell into a sad silence.

“Well then, I guess that’s it! IT’S PUNISHMENT TIME!” the bear was having the time of his life once again. He clearly enjoyed executing people.

“Wait! Can Gonta take Kirumi’s place? Gonta not smart, but Kirumi is needed more!” the Entomologist pleaded.

Kokichi grimaced as other people started to offer their lives in exchange for hers. When he glanced over to Toujo-chan he saw a calculating expression on her face and his heart froze.

The human psyche is truly a terrifying thing.

“To hell with all this value of life shit! Life is not a thing, you can’t put a price on it! And your life doesn’t even belong only to you, it’s for your parents, friends and even strangers. You can’t decide to just throw it away! So, I’m going to go ahead and say it! I wanna live!” Kaito shouted.

For once Kokichi was glad for his presence. Everyone snapped out of the infinite loop of misery and Toujo-chan's face collapsed in disappointment. Kokichi went in for the kill.

“That little speech was something that Toujo-chan is not happy to hear! Do you really think that someone so determined to live would give up so easily?” his face contorted in a scary grin. “She was hoping that we would volunteer to die in her place. But, knowing Monokuma he would not have accepted something so sloppy, so maybe she wants us to rebel and covers her escape? So, Toujo-chan, am I close to the truth?” he said the last sentence with an almost caressing tone.

Toujo-chan glared at him with all the hate she could muster before turning away and faking indifference.

“You… are the most detestable cretin I ever met. You knew exactly what I was doing.”

After losing everyone support, the only thing that she could do was run. And that’s what she did, she ran. The remaining captives watched on a screen as she reached the ground above and started to run without a clear objective in mind. She was cornered in one of the corridors of the building and a string full of thorn was dropped in front of her. She started to climb with iron determination, completely ignoring the wounds in her hands. She kept climbing even when rotating circular saws started to cut her all over her body. Then the string just broke. The sound of her body breaking when she made contact with the floor was nightmare fuel. Despair-inducing.

It took them some time before they were able to climb the elevator and exit the trial ground. Kokichi
was overflowing with bad emotions. He wanted to let them flow out in some way so he decided to simply take a little revenge on the world by throwing someone else under the bus. It wasn't like it had no real sense, exposing Harukawa-chan sooner than later was still a good idea. Still, it was not the reason he decided to taunt her right here and there.

“Everyone, wait a minute! You all seem to think that I’m a terrible liar, yet there is someone worse than me here!” he smiled and put his hands behind his head.

Everyone looked at him with evident irritation except for Gonta that was commenting something about the stars being different from what he remembered.

“I’m talking about Harukawa-chan!” he kept going. "Hoshi-chan forced you to exchange Motive Videos, didn’t he? I mean, he knew your little secret, right?”

Harukawa-chan, showing finally her real potential, moved at light speed and grabbed him by the neck, lifting him up. Her grip was so strong that Kokichi could immediately feel the lack of air in his lungs.

“Oh, will you really kill me in front of everyone? That's not your style, you’d rather kill from the shadow, right? Miss Ultimate Assassin?”

Chapter End Notes

Hi! I just wanted to remind you all that the Present Side is not a side story or anything. It's the opposite, actually. It's called PRESENT Side for a reason. It's fine if you are more interested in the Past Side, I am too for now, but if you don't pay any attention to this one you may completely lose the point later. They are MEANT to be read together, that's why I'm doing it this way, okay? :)
Past Side

Chapter Notes
See the end of the chapter for notes

Fighting for someone

Kokichi was stuffing his face with pancakes.

“What do you mean, nicknames?” Kazuichi was not looking enthusiast.

“How,” Kokichi faked a look of concentration then pointed at him “Kazu-chan!”

“What? That’s mine?! No way!” he slapped a hand on the table.


“Why most of us got a short version of their name and these two got a better treatment?!” Kazuichi was yelling swinging his first.

“’cause I love them both so they get the good end of the bargain, that’s why!” Kokichi lifted his chin high giving himself a snob attitude.

They ate and argued and laughed all together like a real group of friends. Kokichi was really happy, he felt a little bit of guilt, being happy after two people died, but he still was really glad to be there with all of them. The moment then got ruined.

“All my beautiful hopes are here, shining brightly! I’ve seen a new bridge down the road are we going to check?” Nagito was smiling to all of them with his arms open in a welcoming gesture. Everyone stared at him for a bit.

“What do you think guys? Should we tie Mr. Bullshit up again?” Kokichi commented nonchalantly and everyone chuckled.

After they finished eating they started to divide into groups. Kokichi went with Chiaki, Sonia with Mikan, Nekomaru with Kazuichi, Rantaro with Hiyoko and Ibuki with Gundham. No one wanted Nagito. On the other side of the bridge was another island. Kokichi was starting to lose faith in his eyesight.

‘This-was-not-here-yesterday!!’

On the island was a music venue, a motel area and a hospital. He decided to leave the hospital for last, he knew that Mikan was probably going there immediately. The music venue had a little bar, a stage and a little storage room. The storage room was full of stuff but the rest was basically empty. He and Chiaki left the venue when Ibuki entered and started shouting her enthusiasm.

“Leader, I wanted to thank you. This unity… this friendship that we are experiencing… I think that it was possible only because of you.” Chiaki was still looking forward, like what she was saying was just small talk.
“I don’t think that this is all me. I want Fuyuhiko to come back and then I want all of us to end this thing together. But I think that it’s something that all of us want. Our objective is the same, all of us are walking toward the same future. And Love-me-chan helped me a lot too.”

“I know, but without you things would be more chaotic and difficult. Don’t be modest and accept the praise.” she smiled a little, her smile was really sweet and caring.

The motel area was composed simply of motel rooms, nothing interesting there either. He and Chiaki escaped as soon as Hiyoko’s voice, screaming in disgust, reached them. They left her alone with Rantaro, if someone was capable of taking care of her tantrum was certainly the Big Brother. Outside of the hospital they met Sonia who was running out in a hurry.

“Ah, Leader good timing! Quick! Come inside!” she hurried immediately back in.

He exchanged a glance with Chiaki and then followed her. Past the entrance counter was a corridor with a lot of doors, clearly patient rooms. Sonia was waiting for them in front of one of them. She opened it for them, inside was Mikan and… Fuyuhiko. He was in bed, with some bandages covering his head and a sad expression.

“Fuyuhiko, how are you?” Kokichi tried and failed to keep his voice light.

“Yeah… I’m fine.” He turned his back to them.

Kokichi was not surprised that he was depressed, he hoped that Mikan was prepared to deal with this kind of situations. She accompanied them out of the room and gave them a summary of his physical condition. His right eye was permanently lost, the rest was healing better than she expected. She said that he would be up pretty soon.

One by one all of them visited the hospital and learned about Fuyuhiko. The day quickly ended as they exchanged their report of the day. There was nothing useful on this island either. Kokichi was worried, usually, the blasted bear would give them only a day of calm before throwing another test at them. The next day when he got into the restaurant he was greeted by a surprising sight. Fuyuhiko was in there and he was bowing to them.

“I’m Fuyuhiko Kuzuryu, and I’m honored to work with you all starting from today!” his enthusiastic voice took them all by surprise. It was Hiyoko that broke the silence.

“You come here, bow your head and expect to be forgiven? Because of you both Mahiru and Peko died! I’ll never forgive you!” Hiyoko screamed at him pointing her finger.

“No, I don’t expect to be forgiven at all. Still, Peko gave her life for me… Waste it inside a hospital room doesn’t seem the right decision. I’ll spend the rest of my time here trying to be as much help as I can. I hope this is acceptable to you all.” Fuyuhiko kneeled on the ground and rested his head on the floor.

Everyone looked at each other and then at Hiyoko. She pursued her lips in an ugly pout and crossed her arms. Sonia broke the silence.

“Hiyoko, I understand how you feel but we should give him a second chance, right? Fuyuhiko, get up, please. You’ve done enough.”

“Oh, oh! I have an idea! Since there is a music venue in the new island why we don’t hold a PARTY there! A welcome back party! I’ll sing and play guitar! And it’s going to be aaaaaamazing!” Ibuki was making ugly faces again.
They all agreed and then started to bring stuff from the supermarket: drinks, snacks, furniture and decorations. They had a lot of fun preparing thanks to Ibuki’s loud personality, the music venue was filled with strangely shaped decorations, multicolor lights and ugly carpets and curtains. Everyone except for Nagito and Nekomaru was gathered inside the music venue when dusk came. Kokichi could see Nagito outside the door, he was seated on the ground close to the ocean looking at the dark water.

“What are you doing?” Kokichi asked with his hands hidden inside his hoodie pockets.

“Oh, Leader!” Nagito looked up at him. “Are you worried about me, perhaps? No, what I’m saying, obviously someone as bright as you would not be worried about someone like me!”

Kokichi rolled his eyes. He waited in silence as Nagito turned back to look at the ocean.

“Don’t you ever have a feeling of disconnect? Like this world is… No, it’s probably just me.” Nagito’s voice was uncharacteristically quiet and almost melancholic.

Kokichi had no idea how to respond to that, sure, this was all crazy, but a feeling of disconnect? Nagito told him that he had no intention of going to the party and ruin the atmosphere. Kokichi felt a little bit of guilt but he ignored it. Once back inside he went to check on Fuyuhiko.

“Fu-chan, how are your wounds?”

“Fu–Whatever. I’m much better, thank you. And… while I’m not happy that Peko- I still want to thank you. I wasn’t thinking properly. Even if I had killed Mahiru myself she would still have suffered the consequences, either of my death or of my survival… So… On Peko’s behalf I want to thank you for helping me survive, and on my behalf I promise to work with the group from now on and do my best.” he said a bit awkwardly.

“I see, I’m just glad to see that you’re back on your feet and–“

Ibuki took the microphone interrupting them and started screaming presenting her song, then she started singing. Her lyrics were strange and her singing style was rough and full of strange screams. Kokichi was no music expert, but the reaction of the others confirmed that her singing style was not exactly orthodox. Before she could start a new song, though, Monomi popped out of nowhere and scared them.

“Everyone! This is serious! Nekomaru is fighting Monokuma on the beach!” she was waving her arms frantically.

In a hurry, everyone stormed out of the music venue and headed to the beach where Kokichi first woke up. There were Nekomaru and Monokuma, fighting each other with scary expressions on their faces. They were moving at such speed that it was difficult to see them. When they notice their spectators they stopped and looked at each other in a very tense stare contest.

“Attacking me… The experiment’s responsible! You sure have some balls! But too bad, a small fry like you should know his place!” Monokuma’s eyes were glowing dangerously.

The bear united his paws together and a white ray of light was fired towards Nekomaru. They were blinded for a couple minutes and after regaining their sight they rushed to Nekomaru’s side. The muscular Team Manager’s body was covered in wounds and blood. Mikan exanimated him and started whimpering helplessly.

“Don’t panic everyone!” Monomi popped out again. “I, Monomi, will save Nekomaru’s life with all my magic power!” she started waving her magic stick around.
Nekomaru disappeared into thin air. *He disappeared.* Kokichi was speechless for multiple reasons. Nagito, who was looking from a distance, addressed Monomi.

“You have magical powers that can help Nekomaru in a life or death situation… So why you have not helped us earlier? You didn’t save Byakuya, Peko, Mahiru or Teruteru.”

Monomi started to sweat profusely, she looked around like she was searching for help.

“The rules of the g—I mean! I have to go! Sorry!” she flew away into the sky.

There were a lot of things that didn’t make sense in this whole situation but Kokichi really could not ignore them anymore.

But what was Kokichi supposed to believe? That he was inside a video game? In a supernatural novel?

Chapter End Notes

I didn't realize that this was so short, oh well.
I'm sure that most of you have already a good idea of what it's going on.
Nagito is still him, with his hope and luck, but in this case hope is just a word, not a pit of hell :)
In the calm of the night

Harukawa-chan's grip on his neck was getting tighter and tighter.

“Maki, let him go! You're killing him!” Momota-chan screamed getting closer and trying to grab her arm.

She let him go with a click of her tongue and stormed away, her murderous expression fading into one of defeat. She escaped inside the dormitory, probably shutting herself inside her room. Kokichi massaged his neck a little, grateful that his scarf was covering the red marks. Momota-chan, after a bit of hesitation, followed her inside and knocked repeatedly on the door. Saihara-chan and the others were looking at the dormitory and at him in turns, unsure of what to do or think. Kokichi got up and faking a totally composed look reached the dorm, wished them goodnight and then entered inside. Once alone he let out a sigh. Slowly he walked in front of his whiteboard and placed Toujo-chan’s and Hoshi-chan’s portrait pictures next to each other, just like Amami-chan’s and Akamatsu-chan’s. He threw himself on the bed, lying on his stomach, ready to finish that shitty day.

The morning came too soon. Kokichi didn’t really want to get out of his room but he forced himself on feet. In the dining room, everyone was discussing Harukawa-chan’s talent, some of them appeared to have some doubts, after all, it was him who told them. Trust these people to not believe him even in front of the obvious. He proposed to go into her Lab and check for themselves, and so they did. The inside of her Lab looked like an armory, there were weapons of every kind on every wall or stand. There were even targets for practice, sliding across the far back wall. The others were finally convinced now. Saihara-chan was observing him with a pensive expression, he clearly did not forget that little slip-up he had during the trial. Him knowing that he looked all the Videos was not a problem though. It’s not like his reputation could get much worse.

“Oh, oh, what are my little cute students doing here all gathered?” Monokuma was chuckling in a corner. “You're saving me the problem to call you, I guess. Here are your prizes for surviving another class trial!”

Once again the demonic bear gave them some random junk. A golden hammer, a magic key and a ninja scroll.

This time too, the junk was given to Saihara-chan and Momota-chan took the duty to talk to Harukawa-chan. It was a good thing because isolating her could lead to a bigger problem, Kokichi was fine with him trying to confront her. Maybe he would not need to solve this problem at least. Kokichi decided to follow Saihara-chan once again, the first place was clearly the pixel door right outside Harukawa-chan’s Lab. He used the magic key and the door disintegrated into a million little cubes revealing some stairs. Kokichi felt a sour taste in his mouth, more stuff that didn’t make sense.

The fourth floor was… peculiar. The floor, ceiling and walls were made of dark colored wood and the whole floor had a really shabby vide. It looked just like one of those cliché haunted houses you’d see in a movie. On the left there was a corridor with three doors and a strange looking wall, it was almost like a painting or something. The three rooms were identical, very dark, very shabby and very
empty. There were only some candles inside and no windows. In front of the stairs was a long
corridor with two doors, they both led into a Lab. The Anthropologist Lab. The room was full of
everything you can think that may hold some traditional value to some culture. Its ceiling was
incredibly high, giving the whole structure a museum vibe and making the architecture of the rest of
the building completely wrong. From the outside one would notice a portion clearly higher than all
the rest.

Kokichi listened silently to the long and boring explanation that Shinguji was giving about every
piece to Saihara-chan. He was especially enthusiast about some dog statue with a cage and an old
book about séances. Kokichi remembered his Motive Video, something about a dead girl, and started
to have a bad feeling about the whole thing. Then he spotted a golden katana inside a glass case and
decided to take a better look.

“Wow, that’s a super cool katana! I wanna take a look-see!”

“Wait, don’t touch—” Shinguji stormed by his side but he was too late. Kokichi had already unshed
the katana.

“Oh, it’s the real deal, it even has gold leaf all over it. Aaand… this could easily be a murder
weapon.” he put a finger to his lips, faking interest.

It was actually meant to be a warning, Saihara-chan’s expression reassured him that his hint was not
wasted. Shinguji seemed to have caught it, too. An interested expression passed on his face for a
brief second before mutating into aggressiveness.

“Don’t touch my precious artifact, or I’ll tear apart your nerves!” he glared at him.

“Alright, alright!” he faked some tears, just in case. “Wow, my hands are all sticky, this gold stuff
comes off pretty easily!”

He put the katana back into his exhibit case and left the Lab, not wanting to stick around the creepy
guy a moment longer. The other end of the corridor was even creepier, it was all sprayed with red
paint that looked too close to blood to comfort. Going ahead there was a little open space with a line
of statues, some pillars and a hanging scroll. If he were to bet, he would bet that this was another
‘junk inserting’ place. Keeping going forward he found others two doors, both locked. He waited for
Saihara-chan to arrive and try the doorknobs himself.

“It’s locked?” he was perplexed.

“Yep, seems like it. But, Saihara-chan, don’t give up just yet! I have a secret technique that-“

Before he was able to show off his lockpicking skill Yonaga-chan opened from the inside and
invited them in. The room was clearly the Art Lab, it was full of paint cans, wood for sculptures,
xax cans and all kind of art supplies. Saihara-chan asked her why the doors were locked and she
explained that she had the habit to work behind a closed door. Apparently, Monokuma had been so
‘considerate’ to make the room exactly of her taste. The sour in Kokichi's mouth was intensifying.
He commented with Saihara-chan the peculiar ceiling, with exposed beams, and the sliding lock that
was on the rear entrance, different from the key lock on the front entrance.

Since Saihara-chan didn’t seem to mind his company too much he walked by his side, he even
suggested that he should try the ninja scroll on the ninja statue in the garden. Saihara-chan took his
advice and during the walk he kept glancing at him. Maybe it had been a mistake to stick around,
after all, he looked uncomfortable.
“I can’t understand you.” Saihara-chan said suddenly without looking him in the eyes.

Kokichi was momentarily taken aback, is that what he was thinking until now?

“Oh, you can’t figure out that everything I do, I do for you guys?” he smiled, a little sarcastically. He was not going to believe him anyway.

“Is that true?” Saihara-chan was completely serious.

“Sure! Like, I did risk my life to tell everyone that Harukawa-chan is a dangerous murder, right?” he kept mocking him slightly.

Saihara-chan didn’t seem to buy it, he was still looking at him seriously. Kokichi was a bit worried that he may have overdue it a little so he pushed a bit further still.

“I’m always thinking about what’s best for you guys! ‘cause I love each and every one of you!” he said enthusiastically, smiling broadly. He felt a little guilty as Saihara-chan’s serious expression fell into a disappointed and tired one.

The ninja statue was the correct answer, several trees nearby fell on the ground and a building appeared from underground. Kokichi was completely at a loss for words, he didn’t even have doubts anymore. There really was something wrong with all of this. Even Saihara-chan was disbelieving.

“What kind of technology is responsible for something like this…?” he scratched his head.

In was a dojo, clearly Chabashira-chan’s Lab. There were a lot of training puppets and suspended platforms. When Chabashira-chan started lecturing Saihara-chan and Yumeno-chan for their lack of spirits he quickly escaped the building. Outside were Iruma-chan and Kiibo, she was flirting with him and inviting him into her Lab for ‘maintenance’. Kokichi wondered if she had completed the project that he gave her or if she failed and resorted to a more traditional approach. He needed to speak with her later.

After Saihara-chan emerged from the dojo, massaging his back, they started to wonder where the last object, the golden hammer, could be needed. It took them much more time than Kokichi would have believed, even with their mind combined, but in the end they were able to open the strange wall on the fourth floor near the three empty rooms. Inside a room just beyond the wall was a big, fluorescent green, cube and several seats and monitors.

“Oh, how impressive!” the bear was in front of them once again. “You have found the computer room! This computer is especially impressive, you know? It can even create… a new world!” he grinned maliciously and popped out of existence.

Kokichi had a strange feeling about that, he felt like he was forgetting something. He was too focused on his memories to notice that Saihara-chan had found a red treasure chest. He snapped out of it and quickly leaned forward to look inside. Sure enough, it was another flashback light. Kokichi felt the irrational urge to smash it.

“Wow, you find it!” he yelled instead. “You’re pretty dependable despite that lame face of yours! I respect that! Bring that to the dining hall, I’ll bring the others!”

He left the room in a hurry, he didn’t trust himself near that thing. His brain was hurting a little. He did inform the others of it and then waited for Saihara-chan in the dining room. Surprisingly Momota-chan showed up with Harukawa-chan, he hadn’t really believed that he could get her out of her room. Harukawa-chan explained that she didn’t say the truth because she was afraid that they’d all take it the wrong way, being this a killing game and all. Kokichi didn’t have any particular trouble
believing her, it was obvious, but how could she not realize that the later such a thing was coming out in the open the worse the impression? That was why Kokichi only lied about things that didn’t put him in a weak position, even if they’d eventually found out the truth nothing he lied about could give any worse impression.

They decided to use the flashback light, like last time, Kokichi steeled himself for the incoming pain. Once again an image was floating behind his eyelids, it was a memory of an altar with 16 portraits on it. Their portraits.

“Why we are seeing a memory of our own funeral?!”

Everyone was blabbering at once, making impossible to discuss anything. Kokichi listened in silence as all of them described the same exact image that he had seen. Kokichi frowned deeply, could they not see that there was something very wrong with that memory? How it was possible for twelve different people to remember the same exact image, like it was one memory split into twelve? They should have a different perspective, a different timeframe, if all of them were in the same room at that same time they should remember each other! Not to mention that the people they were hearing talking were talking about them, like they weren’t even there! How could this be their memory if they were remembering it from someone else perspective! This was much closer to a movie than a memory.

“Meh, what a disappointment.” he said faking a sad expression.

“Nye, this flashback light was really useless.” Yumeno-chan lazily commented.

“No, I was talking about you guys. What a disappointing reaction.” he put his hands behind his head.

“What do you mean, Ouma-kun?” Saihara-chan was looking at him intensely.

“Oh, nothing, I was lying. Ignore me!” he turned around giving him his back.

Kokichi spent the rest of the daylight revisiting places, like the Anthropologist Lab, that was just too full of stuff. He wanted to talk with Iruma-chan but she was too focused on the computer to listen to him, she told him to come back the next day. As the night rolled around Kokichi was pretty sure that no potential hidden passage and no suspicious object had not been examined.

Passing through the garden he saw Saihara-chan, Momota-chan and Harukawa-chan doing pushups together. They were a little too accepting of a cold-blooded murder but at least the probabilities of her snapping were decreasing. He felt a bit bitter about that though, especially since they never tried to include him, who had never harmed anyone. Obviously, he would not have accepted anyway but a ‘want to come?’ was not that bad to hear. Hypocrite Momota-chan, a killer was okay, a liar not. A classic example of a person who talks big and does very little.

Deciding that it was finally time to get that blasted Love Key, he took a seat in front of the fishing minigame once again. The game was easy and did not require much concentration on his part so after getting used to the game rhythm he let his thoughts fly around. It was time to stop pretending to be blind and consider even the options that he did not want to consider.

In the calm of the night, a theory was starting to take form in his mind.

Chapter End Notes
Did you know that the conversation in the middle of the chapter, between Shuichi and Kokichi, is canon?
Well mostly. It's a conversation I've noticed most people miss.
When you leave the Assassins Lab instead of opening the pixel door immediately explore the floor a bit.
Kokichi is hiding behind a corner.
I always found this conversation to be very interesting.
**Past Side**

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes.

In the calm of the night

“Nekomaru did this for us, didn’t he?”

Rantaro was looking down, he and Kokichi were returning to the cottage for the night. It looked like a constant in this island, one moment you were having a great time and the next moment you were depressed. The party had actually been fun, until it lasted.

“Yes. He is a Team Manager, I guess he was taking responsibility for us, his team. I can understand that.” Kokichi answered him.

“I feel responsible somehow.” he sounded sad.

“We all are and none of us are. There is really no point in dwell in those thoughts. Nekomaru chose that for himself.” he put his hand behind his head.

It may have sounded cruel but it was the absolute truth. The two separated after exchanging good nights and after a long shower filled with thoughts about what he should have done better he changed into his pajamas and went to sleep. The following morning he found Chiaki seated on the first step of the stair to the restaurant.

“Morning Chi-chan. What are you doing seated there?” he greeted her.

“I didn’t want to intrude, I’m waiting for him to stop.” she answered without raising her eyes from her portable console.

“What? Who?” he asked, confused.

She jerked her head a little in direction of the restaurant before returning to her game. He took a couple of steps in that direction before stopping, he had heard a strange sound.

‘Is someone… crying?’

Listening to the sniffing and sobbing he slowly peeked into the room and he was stunned when he saw Rantaro crying messily and loudly. Kokichi just stared completely thrown off balance, the blond guy had always been more than composed until that day! Realizing that maybe he should do something to help he awkwardly walked up to him.

“Hey, what’s wrong?” not the best starting line, he could admit.

“Nekomaru… it’s my fault… that he is dead…” Rantaro was barely able to force the words out.

Kokichi panicked for a moment.

‘Nekomaru is dead?!’

“Are you sure? Who told you? How do you know?” he tried to stay as calm as possible.
“It’s true!” Nagito jumped out of a corner with a wide smile on his face. “Nekomaru is dead! Ah, I even heard that a new person is coming to replace him! So let’s greet him together!”

Kokichi was completely bewildered, how could all of this happen while he was sleeping? From the stairs emerged Hiyoko and Ibuki. The two girls were arguing about something.

“Geez, stop following me! I don’t want you around, you creep!” Hiyoko yelled with her hands on her head.

“Understood, I’ll go away and never come close to you again.” Ibuki had a robotic voice and a strange expression on her face. She looked completely out of it.

When the Musician turned to walk away Mikan emerged from the stairs yelling.

“Please stop! Ibuki, you have a high fever! You need to stay in bed!”

One by one all the others started to appear and the confusion doubled until Monokuma came out of nowhere and silenced them all.

“Third test! How does an Ultimate react to a pandemic, unknown virus? Sounds good, right? These three people were infected by the Despair Disease! It’s a peculiar virus with symptoms that vary from person to person! Nagito is affected by the Liar Disease! Ibuki by the Gullible Disease! Rantaro by the Emotionally Unstable Disease! Well, have fuuun!”

After another spread of panic Kokichi, with Mikan’s help, finally took control of the situation. It was decided that the three infected would be confined inside the hospital to avoid the spreading of the virus. Kokichi, who didn’t particularly fear death or illness, and Fuyuhiko, who was eager to prove his value, volunteered to guard them. Of course, Mikan was necessary on the ill’s side. All the others decided to stay at the Motel close to the hospital, in case of an emergency. After bringing the three patients in their new rooms and make them change into hospital gowns, Fuyuhiko and Kokichi concurred on a communication method with Kazuichi.

The Mechanic has created a pair of monitors and cameras, so they could communicate through video from a distance. Unfortunately, the wi-fi of the improvised equipment was not very strong so they would communicate between the hospital and the music venue two times a day, morning and evening. Having installed the camera on the counter in the entrance Kazuichi left the two guards to their new duty.

The rest of the day was pretty uneventful. They just helped Mikan checking on the patients every once in a while. When the night fell the bear appeared once again, Kokichi was just about ready to drown it in the ocean.

“Hey! Haven’t you read the hospital rules?! No visitors allowed after down!” he yelled.

“We are not visitors, we are here to help---” Fuyuhiko got caught off immediately.

“I don’t care! I don’t care! Only Mikan is capable of taking care of sick people, you're only extras!”

After getting literally thrown out of the hospital Fuyuhiko and Kokichi had no other choice but to return to their cottages to sleep. For some reason Kokichi had a lot of troubles sleeping that night, he kept waking up and then going back to sleep. Still, at some point, he was completely awake. He had no idea why but a wave of alarm was running through his body. Then he heard it, light footsteps inside his cottage. In a swift motion he got up and faced the intruder.

“I-I-I’m sorry! I just wanted to wake you up!” Mikan was trembling, she didn’t have her shoes on
and she was fidgeting in the middle of the room.

Kokichi was not reassured at all. He was pretty sure that he had closed his door with the lock. She should not be there, no matter the reason.

“I’m awake now, what about it?” it came out a bit more harsh than he intended.

“I-I-I just thought that I could pick you up and… That we could go to the hospital together… I’m pretty tired, I thought that maybe you could take a look at the patients while I rest for a bit?” she was not looking him in the eyes at all.

Being a different circumstance, he would even feel guilty that he let his friend shoulder a long night of guard duty alone, but something in Mikan gave him a terrible vibe. Mikan’s mind looked elsewhere completely.

“What about Fu-chan?” he asked her.

“O-oh, I just thought… Since he was wounded recently…” she trailed off leaving the sentence in the air.

“Alright,” he sighed; “let’s go.”

They walk together in complete silence, the atmosphere was awkward. Maybe he was reading too much into this, maybe he was being too harsh. Once inside Mikan went to the upper floor to rest while Kokichi started to check on the ills. The first room was Nagito’s and he was inside, seated on his bed, he looked better than the day before but was still blabbering nonsense. When he got out of the room he started to make his way to the second room but his attention got captured by the blinking of the monitor on the counter.

‘Kazu-chan is not supposed to call until later…’

He switched the monitor on and immediately the temperature in his body dropped. In the video there was a dark room, illuminated only by a candle, on the background was a black curtain and the floor was made of wood. On the center of the monitor frame was a stepladder, right above a rope tied up to create a noose.

Frozen on the spot Kokichi could only watch as a figure, in a hospital gown, made his way to the stepladder and started to climb. Snapping out of the trance Kokichi’s thoughts ran at light speed. This monitor was connected to the music venue, someone was committing suicide inside the music venue!

He considered for a second to call for Mikan but by the time that he would get up the stairs and wake her up that person could already be dead. He sprinted out of the hospital at maximum speed and ran. He barged into the music venue and once again he was frozen on the spot.

A body, with long multicolor hair, was hanging from the lighting baton of the stage, a bag was covering the face. Kokichi’s mind split in half. Half was screaming to him to hurry and get that body down, to save that person. Half was considering the fact that he was tampering with a crime scene, and that he was clearly walking into a trap. The first person to find the body, alone and without an alibi. Not to mention the strange video, this smelled of trap very badly.

Kokichi hurried inside and lowered the baton. He jumped on stage and pulled the bag away from the face. Ibuki’s face. He checked for a pulse, for breath, for anything that would tell him that she was still alive. Nothing.

Immediately entering in his logic and serious phase he noticed that the temperature of the room was
stupidly high. This was intentional. Kneeling beside her body he tried her muscle flexibility in search of the rigor mortis. She was still pretty flexible and her body was warm.

‘This is not really a proof of the time of death. This room is just too hot…’

Accepting the fact that he could not do anything for her he thought about what to do. Returning to the hospital was useless, it was better to search for help at the Motel. His lack of alibi was bugging him greatly. He was already preparing himself for the worse, he had consciously walked into a trap and had no way of countering it. In front of the Motel was Gundham.

“Overlord, Ibuki is dead, we need to gather at the music venue!” he said a bit out of breath because of the run.

“Have you caught the same wretched germ that affects Nagito? Have you become a liar too?” he was very wary of him.

“Overlord,” Kokichi looked at him in the eyes firmly, “you need to trust me on this one. Bring the others to the music venue. I’m going to call Mikan and Fuyuhiko.”

Gundham nodded and went to knock on the doors, Kokichi sprinted once again. He was in front of the music venue when he met Fuyuhiko and Mikan.

“What are you doing here?” he asked them.

“Ibuki disappear from the hospital! I woke up and she was gone! And you weren’t there either, where were you?” Mikan’s question made him grimace.

“Ibuki is right there.” he pointed the music venue.

When they tried to open the door Kokichi had to confront another thing that threw him off balance. The door was shut and didn’t open. They had to push the door really hard with the strength of three people combined to open it. Inside was another nasty surprise.

Not only Ibuki’s dead body, but Hiyoko’s dead body was there.

She was taped on a pillar with duct tape, her neck sliced open, blood creating a little stain on her kimono. Kokichi was absolutely shocked.

‘It’s not possible that I didn’t notice something like that! I refuse to believe it, no one is going to convince me that I did!’

One by one everyone gathered and the usual panic-moment happened. Then Monokuma brought Nagito and Rantaro along, he said that he cured them. Had he not said that the virus was unknown? Stupid bear. Kokichi barely looked at anyone, he was too focused on the pillar. He noticed a piece of black paper-thing hanging from the top. Noticing his distress Gundham sent one of his hamsters to recover it. Kokichi recognized it immediately and hurried inside the little storage room. Inside, rolled differently from last time, was a big wallpaper with the same colors as the pillar, black with red posters on it. The ripped piece of paper coincided with a section of the wallpaper.

Nagito was observing him with great interest, Kokichi ignored him entirely. This was not simply a case, not simply a double murder, this was a direct attack to his persona! Having learned the trick behind Hiyoko’s body calmed him down considerably, he knew already who the culprit was. The only real problem was proving it. He only had circumstantial proofs.

Still followed by Nagito, he made his way to the second floor of the hospital, where he found what
he was searching for. A room with a wooden floor and a black curtain. Kazuichi short-range wi-fi was revealed to be the most important factor. There was still a big probability that they would not believe him though.

This was going to be the toughest challenge yet.

Chapter End Notes

This case was actually the first one that I thought while creating the idea of Kokichi inside this killing game.
Because of Nagito's trap at the start of the trial, remember?
When he tried to convince everyone that Hajime was the culprit?
I thought, what if the movie did not exist? Why did it even exist, the whole 'who was killed first' part has always left me very meh.
Kokichi is perfect for this psychological battle against Nagito, no way I'm ruining it with the movie ticket!
A fearful challenge

Feeling tired and mentally drained Kokichi returned to his room at sunrise.

He undressed quickly, throwing the Love Key in a corner, and went inside the shower room. He needed to warm up after having spent the whole night up. He waited until the water was pleasantly warm and the bathroom mirror was covered in steam. Then, once inside, he crouched down and hugged his knees with one arm, he brought one finger to his lips. While his wet purple hair fell to his shoulders, he revisited the complete theory, putting everything in the correct order.

‘They are tampering with our memories. The reason why I don’t remember how I got here is not that they are super good at kidnapping people but most likely because they erase it from my memory. I still don’t know why, what’s to gain from kidnapping and making 16 kids kill each other? But considering the whole trial ordeal, ridiculously fancy and exaggerated, I’m really considering the tv show possibility. After all, it’s a killing game, right? That would explain why they are giving us such short time frames, if weeks were to run by without nothing happening the people watching would be bored. The first motive, the Blood Perk, clearly backfired. That’s why they put up the time limit. So, this is it for the first murder. I suspect that they would not have killed us if Akamatsu-chan had not done anything, it would make for a really crappy show, right? Anyway… the memory thing explains a lot. Like the fact that they know about our likes and dislikes, how we want our Labs to be… Because they are not done based on us, but based on the memory they gave us of what we like. Like, my need for hiding spots? A Lab that I could find easily? Not a coincidence at all. They made me think that way. And this brings us to the second murder. These Motive Videos are probably complete bullshit. Or at the very least mine and Toujo-chan’s are. And don’t even make my start on the flashback lights. These things are implanting in our brain more and more lies, more and more motivation to kill. Like the fact that we don’t even freak out anymore at Monokuma’s impossible appearances out of the fucking ceiling or floor. And the mysterious objects? No one spent a second thought about a building appearing from the ground. They are probably messing with our brains to perceive that as normal. I wonder though… why is this strange technology affecting me differently from the others? I would like to praise my ego and say ‘because I’m more intelligent’ but I know that’s not it. Wait, now that I think about it Amami-chan was pretty strange too. He did mention the Ultimate Hunt way before we remembered it and he was acting kinda suspicious. Not to mention that strange dream I had. Why would I dream of Amami Rantaro? Did I know him from before coming here?’

That question brought him another, monumental question.

‘Are my memories of my life before coming here even real?’

He stood up abruptly, not wanting to go any deeper with that train of thought. He quickly washed himself, dried up and then dressed with a new set of cloth, trying to distract himself.

*If I can’t trust myself, then what I’m supposed to trust? Who am I, even?*

He stormed out of his room and reached Iruma-chan’s Lab. The horny teenager was inside with bags under her eyes.

“Sooo, Iruma-chan, how is my project coming along?” he put his arms behind his back.
“Keh,” she spat in his direction, “who do you think I am? Of course, it’s going well! Look at this!” she showed him a dark pink ball-thingy. “It’s a prototype! I’ve called it ‘Electrobombs’. It sends magnetic waves that disable all wi-fi transmission. It doesn’t leave any proof behind either! Isn’t it genius?!” she laughed obnoxiously.

Kokichi was conflicted. It was genius indeed but it had been too easy. If his theory was correct there was the possibility that she only thought she created it, in reality, that thing may even be fake.

“But what about disabling electronic machines directly? That thing is not going to stop Kiibo, isn’t it?” he kept spinning his lie, his excuse.

“Of course not, you stupid fucker!” she sighed like he was the stupid one here. “I’m working on it. Electrohammers, I’ve decided to call them. It’s still early.”

“Okay!” he faked a big smile. “While you’re at it, do something else for me.”

“What?! What do you think I do here? Satisfy your all wishes?!” she barked arrogantly.

“Shut up, you slut! Do you have a microscope? A really good one.” he ordered her.

She squirted a little and then reached for the requested object. She then obeyed him when he asked her to examine the air inside the Lab. After a lot of complain and insult the two were facing a strange discovery. The air had a high concentration of little mechanical objects. Iruma-chan was perplexed but he was calm, another step forward to understand.

*They don’t need cameras to spy on us.*

Had said Amami-chan in his dream. Kokichi added another request to the list for Iruma-chan.

“Create something that can clean the air of these little bugs. Something like a filter, with a container for these things that prevent them from seeing the outside.”

“What do you need all this crap for? How do you know about these things? What are they?” she looked suspicious.

“Wow, your complains just never ends, do they? You should get laid as soon as possible, maybe that would calm you down!” he smiled again.

-DING DONG-

-Please, assemble at the gym!-

Kokichi sense of accomplishments faded. This was going to be another motive, wasn’t it? He and Iruma-chan left her Lab and she started to make her way to the building. Instead of following Iruma-chan immediately Kokichi had a flash of inspiration and ran to that strange rock with the letters written on it. He took out his black marker and considered for a second. A nice message, a clever one that would make the others go crazy with doubts and keep the kidnappers on edge.

_This world is mine, Kokichi Ouma._

With a grin he started adding some letters, he would keep adding them after every murder, like a warning for all of them.

Inside the gym almost everyone had already gathered, Gonta was the last one to arrive, he was agitated and Kokichi had a feeling he knew why. Had he not had a façade to maintain he would
have grinned. He decided to test them a little by prodding at Harukawa-chan asking what a murder
was doing there. The test worked well, apparently, most of the other captives had already accepted
her talent and they were reacting badly to his provocation. Only Yonaga-chan, Yumeno-chan,
Chabashira-chan and Shirogane-chan reacted in a positive way to him. He was a bit surprised, what
a strange assembly of girls… he had not realized that they had something in common. Once again the
blaster bear appeared, this time with a black book.

“Tadadan! It’s the Necronomicon! Your next motive is the possibility to bring back to life a dead
classmate! That person will go back to be part of the game!” he said all enthusiastically.

“What?! Bring back?!” Momota-chan looked completely freaked out.

“Let’s not be ridiculous, there is no such thing as resurrecting the dead. A soul persists after death but
the body is like broken glass, it can’t be mended.” said Shinguji with his creepy voice.

“Well, if even Kork there don’t believe it, there is no way that it’s real.” Iruma-chan yawned. “I’m
tired as fuck, I’m going back to bed.”

“Hmm, you think so? I don’t think that it’s that strange at all.” said Yonaga-chan with her usual
carefree tone.

“You… believe that the dead can be resurrected?” asked Saihara-chan with a troubled look.

“More than resurrecting… It’s probably going to return the death to us! You know how all the
bodies disappeared? Maybe they were not dead at all! Maybe they were only fake bodies!” she said
with a slight hint of warning in her voice.

Yumeno-chan, Shirogane-chan, Chabashira-chan and even Kiibo started to agree with her. Kokichi
could see what was happening. Consciously or not Yonaga-chan had an attitude much similar to his,
she was good at manipulating people while looking completely stupid. Somehow the cultist had
gained the girls’ and Robot’s trust. This development was quite new and sudden though. When had
this happened? Kokichi suspected that this was another memory manipulation trick. The flashback
light may have made them react much faster to her manipulation than before.

“Wait, I’ve examined the bodies personally and-“

Saihara-chan’s rebuttal was quickly brushed off, two sides of the argument already forming. Yes, this
was definitely the flashback light ‘manipulation memory’ fault. They were split and confused once
again. This was really never going to end.

“If everyone alive then…” Gonta intervened. “Then maybe message in the grass is message from the
dead?”

Kokichi felt annoyance growing. This is not what his message was supposed to be. Gonta described
the new graffiti ‘th wor s ne I ma’. His little masterpiece was being desecrated by a stupid cultist,
Kokichi was really disappointed. Yonaga-chan picked up the Necronomicon that the bear had
dropped on the floor.

“What are you going to do with that?” asked Shinguji.

“Maybe this is a motive that is dangerous to ignore!” Kiibo spoke up. “Like, if we don’t do anything
Monokuma is going to really kill the survivors!”

“Yeah, yeah, that would be a problem!” Yonaga-chan quickly joined the derailing train. “Thank you
Gonta, you’re a savior!”

Yonaga-chan pulled Gonta into an awkward hug and started to flatter him in a totally obvious way. Then she blabbered something about a Student Council and asked him to join. Kokichi was actually a bit impressed, he could not decide if she was doing it on purpose or not but she had just recruited the most efficient bodyguard of the group. Now she had numbers and strength. A very well planned strategy, worthy of a master manipulator.

“Atua is like a gentle grandmother, she watches over all of us!” she concluded her sermon.

“Wasn’t Atua supposed to be a handsome man?” Iruma-chan commented ironically.

“Atua can change appearance to fit each of us…” Yumeno-chan commented lazily.

“Wow, that’s no suspiciously convenient at all.” Kokichi’s voice was full of sarcasm.

“The Student Council objective,” they completely ignored him, “is a complete eradication of the killing game. Angie is our President!”

“Well, actually it's Atua that does the decision making.” Yonaga-chan was nodding approvingly.

“Oh shut up!” he was getting really fed up of this idiocy. “Geez, they are all brainwashed, what a boring idea.” he was sending a little jab to the genius that had imagined this plotline and put it inside the flashback light. “She is just using the situation to take over and make us all depend on ‘Atua’.”

Obviously, the ‘Student Council’ started immediately to yap at him.

“But…” he raised his voice a little. “I’m surprised that Chabashira-chan joined…” he had a suspect or two about that as well.

The writers of the plotline must have decided to put some girl-on-girl action on the show. The Aikido master was literally a puppy on Yumeno-chan’s feet. Not that she appreciated it in the slightest.

Yonaga-chan, Necronomicon on hands, left the gym and her little servants followed her. The others started to scatter little by little. Kokichi stared at the ceiling for a bit, thinking. The Necronomicon made sense if you consider his theory. They were not going to resurrect anything, they would simply put another person in and then brainwash them all into thinking that it was the same person from before. Probably they would brainwash that person too, to act just like the dead person. It was a depressing thought, if this was really possible then it was impossible to really know who he was spending time with. All of them were complete strangers, and even if they weren’t they could become it sooner or later.

He could not trust anyone but himself, and yet he could not trust himself either.

This was going to be a fearful challenge.
When he entered the music venue Fuyuhiko came up to him immediately, the others stopped their conversation and converged nearby.

“Look, I’ve found this on the door, it’s glue! They glued the door of the music venue to keep us from entering!”

“Does this tell us who the culprit is?” Kazuichi scratched his head.

“Maybe,” Kokichi steeled himself for the task ahead, “but more importantly, I was the one who found the body… bodies… So first I’m going to give my testimony.”

He explained it all. First Monokuma who sent them to sleep in their cottages, then the trip back to the hospital, he didn’t mention Mikan at all, it was not necessary at all since he didn’t want to give any alibi to her. He explained checking on Nagito before receiving the video call and hurrying to the music venue. He remarked the fact that he did not see Hiyoko at all and then proceed with the talk he had with Gundham. He closed his testimony with the meeting with Fuyuhiko and Mikan before entering the music venue and discovering Hiyoko’s body. Then he waited for it, he knew it was coming.

“How do we know that anything you said is the truth?” Nagito had his arms crossed and a faint smile.

“I’ll admit immediately that I’m suspicious.” he kept his voice as calm as possible. “I could be the culprit really easily. Think about it, I was the only person that saw that video, I was the first person here, and I was alone. I’m the only one that knows that Hiyoko’s body was hidden… And that someone went inside here after I left to complete the trick. Logically speaking, I could have killed them both during the night, then reached the hospital and spoke to Mikan, to give myself an alibi, perhaps? Then after that, I just left, spoke to Gundham and then fake surprise at Hiyoko’s body. I could have had all the time in the world if I had prepared all this during the night. I’m an extremely likely culprit.”

His friends were completely silenced. They were exchanging worried glances one another, only Nagito didn’t move at all, still looking at him in the eyes with that faint smile. He was putting him on a test, wasn’t he? He probably already knew everything.

“All right, let’s put this aside for a moment okay? I’d like to explain the dynamic of this case.” No one had any objection, they only looked uncomfortable. “Now. How, where, and why aside we can confirm that Ibuki died by hanging herself, probably someone told her to do it. Hiyoko was caught in between probably, I’m saying this because she was supposed to be in her room. Overlord-chan, or whoever was on guard, did you see anyone kidnap her?”

“I was on duty,” Sonia spoke up, “and I saw her going toward the music venue on her own. I think that she wanted to use the mirror in the storage room, the one in our bathroom is too small. She was having trouble with her kimono…”
“Thank you, Sonchan. This explains it. So Hiyoko was caught in this mess and killed. Now, we are unable to confirm the time of death because of the heat inside here. Someone purposely turned the heater on to fake the rigor mortis. Both girl probably died during the night though. I’ll explain why it’s not likely that they died during the morning. First, I was speaking with Mikan in the early morning, so we have alibis for this timeframe, Overlord-chan was on duty, no one from the Motel was able to go to the music venue. This leaves us with Fu-chan only. Unless Fu-chan has medical knowledge that I’m not aware of, he could not think about something like turning on the heater for tampering with the rigor mortis. Still, this is not a conclusive proof, so let’s leave this at that. I have that knowledge, however, so I’m still the number one suspect if the crime happened at nighttime.”

He purposefully drew away the attention from the second most likely suspect.

“So, with this in mind, we can scratch some names from the suspect list. If, hypothetically, I’m not the culprit then I’m telling the truth, Hiyoko’s body was revealed afterward. Kazu-chan, Sonchan, Chi-chan and Overlord-chan had no way of reaching the music venue after me, you three have solid alibis. The same can be said for the two patients, Mr. Bullshit and Love-me-chan, they were too sick to leave the hospital. So, keeping in mind that, if I’m not the culprit, the suspect list is: Fu-chan and Mikan. Obviously, if I’m the culprit then all of this is just a mental exercise.”

“Alright,” Nagito intervened again, “I’ll humor you. Let’s say that you’re not the culprit. How do you explain Hiyoko’s body?”

“Overlord-chan, remember the piece of paper that was stuck on the baton lighting?” Gundham nodded. “It was part of a wallpaper, it’s inside the storage room if any of you want to confirm it. The culprit wrapped the wallpaper around the pillar covering her body. Then after I left they returned inside, tore the paper away and glued the door.”

“All right, this explains it I guess,” Nagito was still in the same exact position, “but it’s just a hypothesis. Considering just how intelligent you are I don’t doubt that you could have thought of this trick just to divert attention from yourself.”

The nervous tension in the air raised again.

“True,” Kokichi easily conceded the point, “but can you humor me a bit longer? I want to talk about the video I saw. In the video, someone was climbing a stepladder and hanging themselves. Yet, considering the fact that these monitors can only show live footage, and not recorded footage, that must have happened while Ibuki was already dead. So, it was the culprit who did it. To make me run to the music venue and catch me in a trap.”

“That is if the video existed in the first place.” Nagito said in a suggestive tone.

“Are you suggesting that the video was being broadcast live from somewhere else?” Kazuichi looked dubious. “Those monitors have a very short range wi-fi, it can’t be anywhere else than the music venue or the hospital itself.”

“It was filmed from the second floor of the hospital. There is a room that has the same wooden floor and black curtain as this stage. You can go and confirm it yourselves if you want.” he explained. They all looked very dubious.

“Listen man… I really wanna trust you but this is getting a little too… hypothetical.” Kazuichi was scratching his head sadly.

“You are right,” he conceded again, “so let’s make it a little less hypothetical and talk about the
culprit. It can’t be Fu-chan. I was with Mikan until she went to the second floor to rest, then I went inside Mr. Bullshit’s room for a couple minutes and when I got out the monitor was already on. There is only one entrance to that hospital, and I was near it. Sure, he could have entered when I was inside Mr. Bullshit’s room but how did he pass beyond Mikan without being noticed? So, excluding him and all the others that have an alibi... We remain with two suspects only.”

They immediately caught on what he was hinting. They looked at Mikan who started to squirm under their gaze.

“This chick? Seriously, man? I fly could probably kill her!” Kazuichi was not buying it.

“Maybe, but still. The culprit for this case is Tsumiki Mikan. She is the only one who could have broadcast that video live, get Ibuki out of her bed without problems and she knows about rigor mortis. She fits perfectly.” he explained every detail.

“Still no concrete proof.” Nagito again. “You both fit the profile of this killer perfectly.”

“Yeah, you’re right.” as he said that the others looked completely taken aback. “Then how about I give you a proof?” Nagito smile widened a little. “Correct me if I’m wrong, I’m the only one who has seen that video, right? No one else has seen it.”

“Correct.” Nagito was looking at him intensely.

“Then, Mikan. I’ll expose you right here and now. You committed a big mistake in your video! A mistake that says that you’re the culprit!” he declared confidently.

Mikan’s expression shifted. From shy and scared to something much scarier, a blank pointed stare.

“Oh? A mistake you say?” her voice was just as blank.

“Yes, why don’t you guess what is it? I’ll help you, okay? Maybe it was the height of the person I saw in the video?” he suggested cheerily.

“The height? Don’t be stupid, do you even know how tall I am? Or Ibuki?” her voice was getting low.

“Ah, then maybe it was the body type?” he tried.

“Body type? How could you make any body type under a hospital gown?” now a hint of anger was getting clear in her voice.

“What about the illumination?” he smiled.

“There was a candle in both places, what are you even talking about?” the anger was crystal clear.

Kokichi saw Rantaro and Sonia turning their heads toward Mikan with a surprised expression.

“Oh, I know! It was the bag on their heads!” he smiled cheerfully, his voice joyful.

“The bag?! It was the same bag! Are you messing around?!” now she was furious.

Now all of them, except for Nagito who was smiling at him with a satisfied expression, were looking at Mikan with a shocked expression. Kokichi smiled a bit more and then giggled.

“What are you laughing at?! Are you crazy?! Tell me! What is this supposed mistake?!” she grabbed her hair, a crazy expression on her face as she shouted.
“There was no mistake whatsoever, Mikan! Your video was perfect! Sorry, I lied!” he put his hands behind his head still smiling.

Mikan was frozen in place, confused and furious.

“Mikan… How do you know so much about that video?” Sonia tentatively asked.

“Wha… I… I’ve just… looked at the crime scene, it’s… it’s all there…” she pointed at the stage.

“Sure, the candle is there, Ibuki is wearing a hospital gown… But what about the bag? I tossed it aside when I let Ibuki’s body down. You have quite the imagination! How would you imagine that she hang herself with a bag on her head? I would have never thought something like that personally.” he smiled confidently.

“Ohh, looks like is my time to shine!” Monokuma popped out for the millionth time. “You are absolutely correct! The culprit for this case is… Tsumiki Mikan!”

“But why?!” Sonia shouted with tears in her eyes. “Why did you do something like that Mikan?!”

“Oh, well.” Mikan’s expression collapsed once again into the blank stare. “I guess that’s it for me. I was hoping to get a little further in this season of Danganronpa. I guess I made a mistake. I wanted to throw out of the picture the most annoying one, the one that was solving all the cases… I was too greedy I guess.”

“What? Danganronpa? Mikan, what are you talking about?” Rantaro was almost out of breath.

“Oh, nothing really. They would punish me if I were to reveal something in here. I want to live my popularity in peace, thank you very much. I guess I’ll see you all again… later. ” she answered looking bored.

Monokuma grabbed her, they watched from a screen that popped out of nowhere as she, laughing all the while, was sent into orbit riding a big, green syringe. Then Monokuma returned and made the screen disappear.

“Don’t mind her! She just remembered something that she was not supposed to! Anyway, congratulation on surviving! Now go away! Pssh pssh!”

He forcefully made the leave. Out in the sun, they looked at each other completely speechless. They started to scatter, too tired mentally to do anything else than go to sleep. Except that Nagito had another idea.

“I knew that you could do it!” he said to him once they were alone.

“You knew all along that it was her, right? You tested me.” Kokichi’s tone was bitter.

“Oh, yeah. Tonight I was feeling better and I saw her outside of my window with Ibuki. When I saw her body I didn’t have much thinking to do.” Nagito said very casually.

“I can’t believe you… Why you didn’t help me?” he sighed.

“I wanted to see… I wanted a proof… Yes, I was right… You are the light I was searching for.” his tone was extremely heavy now.

Kokichi didn’t know what to say to that. Luckily he was spared, Rantaro was running back towards him.
“Leader! There is a new island!”

This was never going to end, was it?

Chapter End Notes

We are reaching the end of D2,
but don't think that this is going to end so soon, nope.
This story is longer than you may think.

I hope you liked this 'trial' :)
Present Side

A lot of spare time

“What are you doing?”

Kokichi snapped out of his thoughts after hearing Saihara-chan’s voice. He thought all of them had already left the gym, but clearly not. Had Saihara-chan staid behind because he wanted to talk to him? To gain what? He had nothing to give him.

“Me? Oh, don’t worry I was just thinking about a good way to kill you!” he smiled putting his hand behind his head.

“Would you really kill someone?” he looked uncomfortable but still he stood his ground. The trials were doing his confidence some good, clearly.

“I totally would! Unless you kneel and beg like a dog?” he pointed at him.

“No, I’m not doing that.” Saihara-chan rolled his eyes a little.

Even if he always started to look tired after a couple of exchanges with him he always came back, for some reason. Kokichi was starting to get curious, where was the Detective’s limit of patience?

“O-kay! Then how about this, if you wanna live you have to beat me in a game!”

No one was able to put up with his mischief for more than ten minutes, that was one of the reasons why he didn’t make friends. No one was able to get past his personality for long, and if they weren’t able to, then he didn’t want them as friends, they were not worth the trouble.

“What kind of game?” Saihara-chan was wary of him, as it was normal and right.

“Russian Roulette, with a bullet in every chamber! You first!” he did his signature laugh.

“I would die for sure.” he was not buying it, well obviously. “I’m not playing Russian Roulette.”

“Geez, you’re picky for someone that’s about to die! Then let’s go somewhere comfy and play a Shadow Game! It’s time to duel!”

He grabbed his hand and pulled him out of the gym and into the little rest area that was near the dining room. Saihara-chan was still looking uncomfortable as he sat and observed him pulling out a deck of cards from the popular card game.

“He grabbed his hand and pulled him out of the gym and into the little rest area that was near the dining room. Saihara-chan was still looking uncomfortable as he sat and observed him pulling out a deck of cards from the popular card game.

“Do you know how to play, Saihara-chan?” he lowered his voice a little.

“Where did you even get the cards from?” he was looking at him in disbelief. “I know, more or less…”

The deck was part of the stupid collection of junk that was in his Lab, he picked it up just in case because he liked that game a bit. The two played for a short period of time, Kokichi was kinda cheating, he was dragging the game a little longer than necessary while spouting nonsense. Surprisingly, he had fun. Saihara-chan was doing his best to keep up with him, failing miserably, but he did not run away. Kokichi could feel that the Detective had something else that he wanted to ask.
him but he was focusing on the game so much that he was forgetting all about it. Kokichi found himself genuinely smirking at him while he was stumbling on his move with a confused expression.

'I could do this all day.'

In the end, he staged a ridiculous reaction and ended the duel with a draw. He laughed a little more at the tired expression on Saihara-chan’s face. Still, he lasted longer than he thought, he deserved a little prize.

“What do you really want to ask me, Saihara-chan?” he crossed his legs and put his hand on them.

“Oh, just…” he hesitated a little. “Do you believe in the Necronomicon? Like… the whole resurrection thing…?”

Kokichi could not tell if he was hoping to bring Akamatsu-chan back or not. Maybe both options were true. He was not interested in that anyway, there was another thing that he found more important.

“Hmmmm,” he put a finger to his lips, “I dunno… I mean, there are buildings that pop out of grass, a robot-bear that disappears into thin air and the flashback lights…” he said suggestively as possible, “maybe resurrection is not that far away, right?”

Saihara-chan was looking at him straight in the eyes, he seemed a bit frightened honestly. He reached on top of his head like he was trying to adjust his hat and looked away.

“Well, what do I know!” Kokichi jumped up and quickly retrieved his cards, “I’m a liar after all!”

He ran away feeling Saihara-chan eyes on his back. On the way to the entrance, he found Kiibo.

“Oi, Kiiboy!” he yelled at him obnoxiously.

“Oh, it’s you,” the Robot turned to him with a resigned expression, “what do you want now?”

“I’m suuuper surprised that someone like you believes in that nonsense that Yonaga-chan is spouting! Since when robots need a God? You need a good mechanic!” he chuckled with his hand behind his head.

“It’s not something new for me! I’ve always heard a voice inside me that would guide me toward the correct path! My inner voice guide me always!” he puffed his chest with pride.

Kokichi blinked, once, twice.

‘Inner voice? Is that like a program code? Is he really being controlled by someone?’

He spent the rest of the evening pestering him for more information but the robot mostly ran away without answering him. Kokichi returned to his room thinking about what he should do. Laying on his back he reflected on the fact that there was no escape route anywhere, only the underground tunnel. It was pretty unlikely that an escape route was placed on a higher floor. Of course, he would still check every time a new area was opened but he didn’t have any faith in it anymore. His best bet were the Electrohammers. With that, he could disable the electronic traps and reach the end to see what was there. He would not bring anyone there until he was sure that it was safe and useful. He would not give any false hope to anyone, while Iruma-chan was working on that the only thing he could do was keep an eye on the situation.

Having reached a conclusion he undress for the first time and fell asleep in his new pajamas. The
following day he woke up later than usual and a bit more relaxed. He went to have breakfast and his good mood was immediately spoiled by people shouting. Apparently, Momota-chan was protesting loudly against the Student Council. He sat and started to eat listening closely.

“There was no need to block the manhole!” Momota-chan was waving his fist.

‘Covering the manhole? You don’t mean that manhole do you? Our only hope?’

“Yeah, we decided that there was no need anymore,” Yonaga-chan said completely unaffected by the atmosphere, “we don’t need to be greedy. We are going to live in this Academy for the rest of our lives! There is food, a lot of space and good company! The manhole would only remember you of the outside world!”

“Yesterday you and Maki were out of your room after nighttime, right?” Shirogane-chan was questioning Saihara-chan. “This is totally not good! Kirumi’s crime would not have happened if none of us were outside at night!”

“That’s right,” once again Yonaga-chan jumped at the opportunity, “no one should be allowed outside during nighttime! Atua says that we should implement a curfew! From now on the Student Council will take care of patrolling the school at night!”

“Puhuhu, my dear students!” Monokuma was snickering in a corner, like usual. “I’ve brought you a new gift! I see that all of you are doing your best so I feel generous! Ta-dah! A flashback light!”

Kokichi’s interest perked up, was it possible that what Yonaga-chan was doing was actually not what the kidnappers wanted? So they were trying to change her mind with another one of those? Yonaga-chan grabbed the flashback light from the bear’s hand, dropped it on the floor and then stomped on it. As everyone began to rant against her, Kokichi considered that maybe, for once in her life, she had actually done something well done.

“Are you crazy?! We could have learned more about the Ultimate Hunt or the funeral!” shouted Momota-chan.

“Why would you want to do that?” she looked disappointed. “We don’t need to know about anything that’s happening in the outside world, this is our world now! The flashback light would only make you want to leave even more!”

“Anyway, Angie,” intervened Shinguji, “have you decided what you’re going to do with the Necronomicon?”

The creepy guy seemed to have an insane interest in that stupid book. Did he plan to resurrect someone himself? Momota-chan squirmed uncomfortable, looking pale. Kokichi could not understand if he was scared or what.

“Oh, yeah.” Yonaga-chan was again cheerful. “We discussed and we decided to bring back Amami Rantaro! I mean, we cannot resurrect convicted criminals! Like Kurumi, Ryoma and Kaede! We decided to use it as a precautionary measure. If Monokuma gives us a time limit again we are going to kill him again.”

Kokichi had too many emotion to understand truly what he was feeling. He was eager to see him again, yet he didn’t want to see him again. He was not going to be Love-me-chan anymore if his theory was correct. Even if it wasn’t, to come back and being used as a ‘safe kill’ was beyond cruel. That, of course, was true for all of them, but for Love-me-chan especially, for some reason. He had to stop this somehow.
Yonaga-chan and her servants left the dining room looking like men on a mission, soon after Momota-chan and Harukawa-chan left too, Shinguji was eating without a care in the world. Kokichi caught Saihara-chan’s attention before we could follow them.

“Hey, hey!” he taunted him. “What do you think about the fact that they are going to resurrect Amami-chan? We know nothing about him anyway, maybe we are resurrecting the mastermind!”

“If he was the mastermind this game would have already ended, right?” he put a hand on his mouth like he did every time he was considering something. “But it’s true that he was pretty suspicious and he was the first one to remember the Ultimate Hunt… And truly we don’t know much about each other but…”

“Well,” he interrupted him with a high pitch voice, “I would rather they bring back Akamatsu-chan! I mean, is not what you were hoping for? You would rather have her back, right?”

“What are you saying!” Saihara-chan was a bit panicked.

“Why? Isn’t obvious? It’s because I love you the most! I’m always thinking about you! I wanna support you and your happiness!” he made a fake enthusiast face and his voice was like that of a little child.

“You know, you don’t need to be so-” Saihara-chan looked tired again.

“Anyway,” he shamelessly interrupted him again, “you know that once I’ve seen an anime about a death game? It was quite interesting. The people behind it were manipulating the events to make the people inside believe that everything they were seeing was true! It made me irritated though, they were sooo slow in understanding what was going on! Half of the deaths could have been prevented if only they had observed a bit better!”

They stared into each other’s eyes for a bit until Kokichi grinned at him and ran away from the dining room with a wave of his hand.
Kokichi followed Rantaro to a new bridge.

He could not believe what he was seeing, the new island was a gigantic amusement park! Actually, he could. It was already quite some time ago that he had established that this was not the world he was used to. Where he was, was another matter entirely.

“Kazuichi, Sonia and Gundham are riding the ferry wheel, she wanted to and the other two invited themselves. Fuyuhiko is waiting for us in front of the rollercoaster.” Rantaro gave him a summary of the situation.

Fuyuhiko was not alone in front of the rollercoaster, Monokuma was with him, and Nagito joined them soon after. They waited for the others to gather then the bear started speaking.

“Ah, my test subjects! Welcome, welcome! Since you have been such good kids I’ve decided to give you a reward! I’ve hidden some boat parts inside the Funhouse! If you ride this rollercoaster you will reach the Funhouse and you can claim your prize!”

“This stinks of a trap.” Kokichi was completely unsurprised.

“Yeah,” Nagito smiled, “maybe this is a trap. On the other hand, don’t you think that it’s suspicious that everything is going so well for you, Leader?”

Kokichi knew that he should not acknowledge Nagito in any way, yet he took the bait nevertheless.

“What do you mean?”

“I mean, you could be the traitor sent by Future Foundation, couldn’t you? Everything is going so incredibly well for you… Everyone respect you, you solve every case in a blink… But if you’re in this with Monokuma… There is the possibility that the culprit is the person you want it to be, I’m I wrong? Like with Mikan, maybe you made her go crazy and used her. You could be the mastermind.” Nagito was smiling amiable.

“You trying to start some shit, you bastard?!” Fuyuhiko showed his fist. “If we are alive today is thanks to him, certainly not thanks to you! No way I’m gonna believe you over him!”

The others nodded in agreement, Kokichi didn’t say anything. He didn’t have a magical proof to extract from the pocket that would show irrefutably his innocence.

“Well, I don’t really care.” Nagito put up his hands in a pacifying gesture. “Should we decide if we are going to ride this thing or not?”

With four votes for yes and two for no, it was decided with the majority vote. Kokichi abstained from voting. They took place inside the rollercoaster, Rantaro sat beside Kokichi.

“A lot of spare time
“Thanks but no, I’m not mad, his reasoning perfectly logical. If anything I’m irritated that I don’t have anything to say for myself. It could be true for all you know.”

“That’s not what you are supposed to—” he sighed. “Well, anyway. A mastermind, ha? I wonder why this word stuck in my brain so much. And by your reasoning, there is nothing that proves that I’m not the mastermind either, is there? Or any of the others. Guess we are all stuck with believing in each other, hm?” he winked.

The rollercoaster was climbing higher and higher but Kokichi was starting to feel sleepy, for some reason. Even before they could reach the higher part of the track he could not keep his eyes open. He woke up with a jolt and for a long moment, he could not understand anything. His friends, plus Nagito, were waking up near him, they were all on the floor of a strange pink room.

“What’s the meaning of this!” he yelled snickering again. “The meaning is obvious, I believe.”

“Welcome to the Funhouse!” Monokuma was yelling cheerfully. “This is Strawberry house and somewhere around here is Grape house too! I suggest you to explore this place since it’s where you’ll spend the next days! Oh, I hope that you’re happy, an old friend of yours is here somewhere…”

After the bear popped out of existence they got up and observed the pink room, the walls were so stupidly bright and pink that their eyes started hurting in only minutes. They decided to split into teams of two and explore, Kokichi was with Rantaro. The Strawberry house was composed by the room where they woke up, a lounge, two deluxe bedrooms, a standard bedroom and two crummy bedrooms. Then there was a long corridor with an elevator and a door with a strawberry painted on it at the end. Beyond the door was a circular room, with another door, a grape was painted on it, and there was something in the center.

“Neko…maru…?” Rantaro didn’t sound really sure.

Kokichi could see why. *Something* that looked vaguely similar to Nekomaru was snoring loudly on the floor. The problem was that that thing was *metallic*. It was a robot, no matter how you look at it. The others reached them and had a very similar reaction. Chiaki took the situation in her hands and crouching down she poked it, him, that… woke up after a while and yawned.

“Ohh, my dear friends!” the thing yelled. “Monokuma told me that you would come for me but I didn’t really believe it, I thought he was just pulling my leg!” he laughed loudly.

“He… seems really Nekomaru, alright…” Fuyuhiko smiled uncertainly.

Once again Kokichi had to suspend his disbelief. They all welcomed him back, the worst part came when he asked where the girls were. Nagito was the one that, with his usual delicacy, told him everything. Then they asked him if he knew how to get out of this place and if there were ship parts anywhere.

“I don’t know anything about ship parts…” he scratched his metallic head, probably more out of habit than need. “But maybe now that you’re all here we can open that door there!”

The door with the grape didn’t open, however, so they went back inside Strawberry house and tried riding the elevator. It worked and they reached a place similar to Strawberry house only it was green. Grape house. After a bit of running around, they discovered that is was absolutely identical to Strawberry house. Same rooms, same disposition. No exit and no ship parts.

“Hey, Monokuma!” yelled Kazuichi. “What’s the meaning of this!”

“Did you called me!” the bear appeared snickering again. “The meaning is obvious, I believe.
You’re going to conduct the fourth test inside here! The title of this test is ‘what does an Ultimate do when he is bound to die by starvation?’ Interesting, right?! This is especially inspired, let me tell ya! Ah, there are no ship parts, It was a trap. So sorry!! Now, if you want to survive and exit from here you better kill someone! Bye!”

After a long, astonished silence Nagito spoke.

“So it was a trap. Oh, well.”

“Oh well?!” Kazuichi yelled at him. “I’m killing you!”

“Calm down Kazuichi!” Nekomaru grabbed him by the belt. “Now it’s really not the time to freak out. Leader, I think that we need to search this place much better and find an exit, there must be one!”

They agree to try once more. During the search, Kokichi noticed that there were no windows anywhere, so the only way to know the time was by using Nekomaru’s integrated clock or the clocks in the two lounges.

By night they met inside the circular room, which they nominated tower, and decided to stop the search. They were all tired, and wasting energy was not a good idea. Chiaki proposed a test to verify her theory about the towers. She was sure that is was a single tower in the center of the two houses and that they were connected by the two doors. For some reason, though, they were forced to use the elevator to change house. She left her handbook on the floor and they rode the elevator once again to change house. She was right, the handbook was still where she left it, the room was exactly the same. Why Monokuma would go out of his way to make thing difficult was beyond their comprehension.

Since the rooms had different qualities they decided to play rock-paper-scissors to decide which room was assigned to who. Chiaki and Sonia got the deluxe of Grape house, Nagito and Gundham the deluxe of Strawberry house, Nekomaru the standard of Strawberry, Fuyuhiko and Kazuichi the crummy of Strawberry and Rantaro the crummy of Grape. Kokichi had the standard of Grape house.

Kokichi was asleep even before he touched the bed. The following morning everyone was walking around hungry and unhappy. The bear appeared again to tell them that every morning they had to gather inside Strawberry tower at eight in the morning to make sure that all of them were still alive. He told them that the following day a new place would be revealed too.

While wandering around Kokichi noticed that Sonia and Gundham had gotten a lot closer lately. He saw Gundham blush deeply for something that the Princess told him. Kokichi was happy for them, really. Kazuichi had noticed too, he was sneaking around corners all the time, hoping to find her alone. He was clearly jealous but he had no chances with her, that was for sure. Nagito had apparently decided that his new mission was to pester everyone he could get close enough, probably he was hoping to annoy someone enough to kill him or something. Rantaro had decided, instead, to take very seriously his self-chosen duty of bodyguard for Kokichi. He was following him everywhere. Kokichi didn’t really mind, a pretty looking guy was always welcome.

“Tell me something about you.” Kokichi asked at some point.

“For example?” Rantaro smiled, amused.

“How did they chose you as the Ultimate Big Brother? That doesn’t seem something you just discover one day.”
“Oh, I have twelve little sisters.” he answered completely casually. “I take care of all of them a lot and so stuff just kinda happened.” he observed Kokichi’s surprised face and laughed a little. “I take that you’re an only child?”

“Yeah, I am.” he answered a bit more curtly that he indented.

“Bad question?” Rantaro was always quick to pick up mood changes. “Some problem with your family?”

“I don’t exactly have one, but please don’t feel bad because of me, I want to hear more about your sisters!”

They spent a nice day laughing about some of the most ridiculous family’s stories that Kokichi had ever heard.

Chapter End Notes

Kokichi's backstory (will be mentioned a bit more later) is completely made up.
Since I have decided that DICE is something that's faked inside V3 in this killing game (D2) he has different memories.
I'm sorry for the DICE's lovers, but as much as it is a charming idea it doesn't really fit this Kokichi.
Basically, everyone chooses to believe what they want for Kokichi's past, this is my personal view.
Rantaro instead has some material in his free time events, I've used that for this killing game.
Since he had no possibility to talk about it in V3 it seemed fitting to use it here.

Also, there are ships not mentioned in the tags that have a minor role, it's not really useful for them to appear in the respective fandom pages, but they are my ships and I'll die with them XD
Present Side

Chapter Notes

Thanks everyone for the comments, the kudos and the hits!
Soon the story will finally start to pick up the pace, the introductory part is almost done,
I hope you will follow me a bit longer :)

Warning for this chapter:
Miu.

A secret rendezvous

Kokichi sprinted up the stairs and reached the Art Lab.

As he thought, Yonaga-chan had indeed chosen that place as her base of operations. It was one of
the few places that was completely locked after all. Yumeno-chan was standing in front of the front
door looking bored.

“Hey, what is my favorite mage doing here?” he tried to play innocent with his hands behind his
head and a smile.

“Nye, what do you want, you’re not welcome here…” she said in her usual sleepy speech pattern.

“Wow, that stings, Yumeno-chan!” he sprouted some fake tears. “I didn’t think that you were so
mean!”

“You’re here to stop the ritual, I’m sure,” she pointed at him, “but unfortunately for you, I’m here as
a guard! No one will get past me and my magic! Don’t force me to send you away!”

‘I would like to see you try actually… Considering the whole memory stuff it’s not so farfetched that
they would insert fake magic too.’

“Nothing that you can do would work anyway,” she looked a bit flustered like she had just read his
mind and had not liked what she had found there, “Angie is locked inside and she will open the door
only for Student Council members. And you’re not!”

“I see, pretty clever, have you thought about this? If so you’re really smart!” he sugarcoated her a bit
and left with a wave of his hand.

There was nothing to be done there, it would be better to wait for the night and use his lockpick
ability to open the door. In the meantime, there was another place that he forgot to visit until now, the
Love Hotel. He reached his dorm room to retrieve the Kay that he had thrown in the corner and then
forgot about all. Once the golden key was in his hand he entered the casino area and opened the door
of the Love Hotel. Beyond the door was a long corridor with a lot of doors, it didn’t look much like a
Hotel. Before he could take the first step inside the damn bear appeared.

“Hey, hey, hey! What are you doing here at this hour?!” he yelled. “You are supposed to come here
at night, in your sleep!”

‘What?’

“You didn’t even let me explain, geez, were you so eager to get laid?!” he snickered. “You are in luck! Another person is sleeping at this strange hour, so can have a partner!”

‘What?’

“Now, now, let me explain the setting!” he put his paws on his mouth. “To ‘help’ you, your partner will believe that you are their ideal, their forbidden dream! Basically, they will swoon all over you! But remember that you need to play the part or they will wake up in anguish! Well, then! Enjoy yourself!”

‘What?’

A door opened and he was literally pulled in like a magnet, the door banged behind him. The room was all pink, red and yellow, there was a huge bed, a bath area, a… kinky area and a rotating horse, for some reason. In the center of all this was… Iruma Miu.

‘What?’

“Oi, I have some fantastic news that will put a smile on your face!” she puffed her chest.

‘Why I have a feeling this is not about the Electrohammers or anything like that?’

“Since we are childhood friend you get the scoop first!” she continued. “Ehm, sooo… You can have your way with me… if you want…” she was all flustered.

‘I don’t.’

“I wanted to thank you and… what better reward for a man…” she played with her hair. “But that’s just an excuse, what I really want is… your child.”

Kokichi’s face contorted in disgust, he searched for the door with his eyes.

“What’s wrong, you don’t want to be inside me? If you’re not gonna use that dick of your now, then when?!?” she got aggressive all of a sudden. “You know what? Fuck that! C’mere, I’m gonna squeeze every last drop out of you!”

Kokichi made a run for the door, the whole world could see the moment of maximum cowardice of his life and he didn’t give a fuck. He slammed the door shut on her face.

‘She’ll wake up in anguish? I would wake up in anguish for the rest of my life had I stayed there! What kind of nightmare is this?! That Key is fucking dangerous!’

He ran out of the Hotel at full speed and kept running even outside of the casino area. He stopped only when he reached the resting area near the dining room. Kokichi dropped his head on the table, it took him some time to calm down but when he did he realized something.

‘Wait a second, what purpose does that place serve? They are not selling underage porn, are they? I mean… they kidnapped us and forced us to kill each other… I guess porn is not exactly worse… Is this being shown to a specific selection of people? Should I tell everyone else about the dangers of those Keys?’

“Are you okay?”
Kokichi raised his head quickly when he heard Saihara-chan’s voice. Not having reached a decision he just yelled the first thing that came to mind to distract him.

“Saihara-chan, let’s have a tea party!” he grabbed the Detective’s hand.

“Wait, Ouma-kun!” Saihara-chan stumbled on his own feet but Kokichi dragged him mercilessly inside the dining room.

Kokichi plopped down on a chair with an exaggerated sigh.

“Ah, I miss Mommy’s cooking, you know? She baked some delicious cookies once!” he pointed at him. “I’m tired, you do the Maid, go and fetch some tea!”

Saihara-chan sent him an annoyed look but went into the kitchen anyway. After some minutes he came back with a tray of hot tea.

“You’ll be a wonderful wife someday, did someone already told you that?” Kokichi raised his eyebrows innocently. “You’re exactly what I need after seeing a cow.”

Saihara-chan looked like he wanted to ask something but refrained. They drank the tea in silence for a few minutes.

“You do have a theory about what’s going on, don’t you?” Saihara-chan asked suddenly. “Why don’t you share it with us?”

“What are you talking about, I was just telling a lie! Did I get ya?!” he leaned back in his chair.

“Unless you want to join my secret evil organization I won’t tell you a single truth! How does that sound?! Wanna join?”

“I’m going to have to decline.” he sighed. “I really don’t understand why you can’t cooperate with us normally. You have a good mind and you catch on things quickly, even faster than me. Why can’t you just help us?”

“It doesn’t work like that, Saihara-chan.” Kokichi lowered his voice adding a hint of warning and inched closer to his face. “Do you really think that my brain is free of charge? That you can use me in the name of some idiotic feeling like ‘friendship’? Just because everyone is depending on you it doesn’t mean I’m going to be your underling. If you want my cooperation you have to earn it and offer me something of equal value too. You have nothing to offer me right now, do you?”

They stared at each other for a long moment before Kokichi started his signature laugh.

“Ah, after taking this refreshing break and seeing your beautiful face I’m all energized again!” he jumped on his feet. “I’m going to go and pester someone else now, bye bye Saihara-chan!”

Kokichi left the dining room and the Detective made no attempt to stop him. It was already sunset, he checked the Art Lab but Chabashira-chan was still in front of the door. He decided to pay a visit to Iruma-chan, even if he didn’t really want to see her after the ‘incident’. The Inventor was in her Lab like she was supposed to.

“Oh, it’s you. Don’t say a word, I’m in a fucking bad mood, got that, you dickchees?” she spat in his direction. “Your stupid bug thingy is ready, take it and go away!”

So he did. He took the Bugvacum and quickly fled the Lab. He was about to go into his room when he saw Harukawa-chan and Saihara-chan getting approached by Chabashira-chan outside of the dorm. Kokichi wondered where was the stupid Astronaut. He had not seen much of him lately. He
eavesdropped them talking about the ritual. Apparently, the Aikido master wanted to stop the cultist. He approached them with his usual obnoxious grin.

“Wow, is this a party?” he hid the Bugvacum behind his back. “Iruma-chan is in her Lab, Shinguji is drowning himself in his books, you two are wondering around… The Student Council really is rubbish at maintaining discipline, isn’t it?!”

“You are no better, no, you’re the worse, you lying degenerate!” Chabashira-chan was aggressive as always. “Go away, no one wants you here! Go in your room and sleep!”

“You wound me!” he faked some tears. “I was just being friendly!”

He noticed that Saihara-chan was refusing to meet his eyes. He looked mildly annoyed.

‘Is he mad because I told him that I won’t be his underling so easily? Talk about being immature…’

“Well, I can see when I’m unwanted,” he sighed dramatically, “I’m going to bed! Good night!”

Obviously, he didn’t. After hiding the Bugvacum in his room he followed them up the floors discreetly and observed as they entered the Art Lab thanks to Chabashira-chan. He waited for a bit and then they left the Lab looking defeated. He heard footsteps and hurried inside Shinguji’s Lab. He was surprised to find it empty, he was already preparing some stupid lie to throw at him. Deciding it was better not to risk it he descended the stairs and waited for the others to pass by. He reflected on the fact that it was useless to wait there, Yumeno-chan was guarding the door again and Yonaga-chan was still inside. He could not lockpick a guarded door and what was the point in entering in secret in an occupied room? Yonaga-chan had to eat at some point right? He just hoped that she was not too quick with that ritual thing. He didn’t even have an idea of what she was doing in there. With a sigh, he returned to his dorm room and tried to sleep.

That night he dreamed of Amami-chan again. They were inside a green luminescent room, a place he felt familiar with but that somehow could not remember. They were talking about one of his little sisters and they were having a lot of fun. Then he dreamed of a circular room, inside were people he could not see clearly, they were all gathered around something big and metallic on the floor. Next, a white-haired guy appeared and with a smile said that Kokichi was a fraud. That all of them were frauds. That none of it was even real. Then he saw another guy, with four hamsters on his shoulders. What a peculiar thing to dream about.

He didn’t know why but he woke up with tears in his eyes and an intense feeling of loss.
The third day inside the Funhouse started in the worse way possible.

While they were all in a bad mood because of the hunger pangs and the rooms were filled with the noise of stomachs grumbling, Monokuma, true to his word, appeared again.

“Wow, you really look horrible!” he mocked them. “Isn’t it better to just kill someone and getting out of here already?! Well anyway, about that, you may wonder ‘how I’m going to kill someone, there aren’t any weapons here!’ Here is Monokuma, ready to help!” he had a smug look. “I’ve added a room to the Funhouse: the Final Dead Room! Basically, you have to play a life-threatening game and then you’ll get access to the Octagon, a secret weaponry! Inside there is everything that you may need to kill someone, from knives to axes to poison! Have fuuun!”

After the bear disappeared they searched for that ridiculously named room. No matter how much they hoped it to be a false bait, unfortunately, the room existed. It was incredibly visible, insert in a wall that was completely bare until that moment. A big red writing was showing the words ‘Final Dead Room’.

“What are we going to do?” asked Kazuichi. “Should we try it? Maybe there is an exit on the other side…” he sounded almost hopeful.

“No, I really don’t think that’s possible.” Chiaki’s voice was really feeble. “Monokuma enjoys seeing us suffer. It would not make any sense for him to place an exit so easily.”

“Damn it! How much more do we need to suffer?” Kazuichi was losing his composure.

Rantaro and Chiaki did their best to calm him down, Kokichi didn’t say anything. He could feel very clearly that the situation was not going to last for much longer. The only problem was: how far was he willing to go for his friends? Would he be able to kill for them? Or rather to kill himself—

“Let’s cease this foolish bickering!” Gundham’s voice roared loudly. “Don’t force me to unleash my demon power! You would not like me when I’m angry!”

“Please stop this, Kazuichi!” Sonia yelled at him. “You’re going to get destroyed by his evil power!”

“Miss So—“ Kazuichi was interrupted by Gundham once again.

“Indeed, well said my Dark Lady!” he smiled crossing his arms. “I have overlooked ten possibilities to kill you already.”

“Uhh, Dark Lady, hm?” Kokichi teased. “Anything you want to confess, Overlord-chan, Sonchan?”

“Wha-wha?!” Kazuichi was completely lost.

Then Nagito started to offer his life for their sake and they all scattered as fast as possible. Later Kokichi was approached by Fuyuhiko who wanted to discuss the possibility of attempting the Final
Dead Room.

“We are men of honor, aren’t we?” he was saying. “We should take the situation in our hands. Of course, I’m not saying that we should kill anyone, so let’s try that room.”

“So you think that I’m a man of honor now?” Kokichi tried to distract him.

“What are you talking about, you knew that already.” he smiled a little. “I acknowledge you a lot of time ago. I can’t exactly start saying that you are my superior… my family would kill me for that, but we can be equal, right? We can be… friends, I guess.”

“Of course, we can! What’s there to guess? Aren’t we already friends?” he returned his smile.

“Actually, It’s not so easy for me.” Fuyuhiko shrugged. “I never met someone with my same level of social standing. I only knew Peko, but she was not my equal. You are a Leader too, I’m sure that my family will accept you without any problem.”

“I see, I’m happy that you have such high consideration of my skills!” he smiled broadly.

“Normally, I would offer you a cup, to toast at our brotherhood.” he looked sad now. “But in his situation is not so easy, ha? I guess we will toast once we get out of here, together, alive.”

“Toast with alcohol?” Kokichi grinned.

“With water.” Fuyuhiko grinned back.

They both laughed loudly, having reached an understanding. They shook hands too. Kokichi went into his room with a smile still lingering on his lips. The threw himself on the bed and sighed, his good mood dissolving. Fuyuhiko was right. He managed to distract him enough earlier but he could actually agree with him. He was not going to make him risk his life, though. He already knew what he was going to do later in the night, yet the time seemed to fly while he was trying to throw away all doubts.

It was not really possible to see what time it was from inside the room so he went out and checked the clock in the lounge. He made sure that no one was around and made his way toward the Final Death Room. It was 10 pm. His heart leaped out of his chest when he heard a voice behind him while he was descending the stairs.

“Where are you going?” it was Chiaki.

“Bathroom.” he pointed at it, it was a happy coincidence that the bathroom was nearby.

“You are not going to do anything dangerous, are you?” she tilted her head a little. “Don’t feel pressured to save us all. Please.”

There was something peculiar in her, it was not strange that she could guess where he was really going but the way she was talking was much more… insightful. They stared at each other for a second then he smiled cheerfully at her.

“No way! I’m a selfish person!” he put his hands behind his head.

“All right then, I won’t press you,” she smiled at him sweetly, “have a good night of sleep, Leader.”

He entered the bathroom and waited for a reasonable amount of time then he left looking perfectly at ease, in case she was waiting for him outside. She was nowhere to be seen and the room was too
empty to offer any hiding spot. He entered the Final Dead Room.

“I should have known…” Kokichi smiled sadly.

“It seems that two great minds think alike.”

Gundham was not going to apologize or act ashamed, he knew that very well. Even more than Fuyuhiko, Gundham was content on letting things in other people’s hands but had no trouble picking up duties that no one else wanted. Two great minds think alike indeed.

“You can return to the darkness, fellow Overlord, I’m taking things from here.” he pointed at a gun.

“What’s that?” Kokichi came closer and stood by his side.

“Russian Roulette.” he didn’t look very impressed. “I’ve already done it, I’ve overcome the evil power on my own. There is no need for you to take this test of courage.”

Kokichi ignored him, took the gun and loaded a new bullet. Then he pressed it to his temple and pulled the trigger. Nothing happened. He smiled at Gundham.

“There is just no way I’m not passing a test that my fellow Overlord-chan has passed. Don’t insult my pride.”

Gundham nodded and both of them went past the door that opened after the test. On the other side was indeed an armory. There were lots of cutting weapons, blunt weapons and so on. There were even refrigerators full of poisons of all kind. The most important thing, though, was a window. Outside of the window was a partial view of the Funhouse. Kokichi was really surprised when he realized that they were thinking about it all wrong. Grape house and Strawberry house were not on opposite side, separated by the tower. They were one on top of the other. There was even a trapdoor that connected the two houses in this room. Gundham and Kokichi discussed for a long time about all this but they still had no solution other than the one that Gundham was presenting.

“I’m going to kill Nekomaru.” he said calmly.

“Why him? It’s because he is a robot?” Kokichi said as calm as him, already accepting.

“No, what foolish reason is that?” he raised his voice. “I don’t want a free kill, I want a fight. I’m going to fight the most powerful opponent here and kill him or die trying!”

“I understand that.” Kokichi sat on the floor near the window and hugged his knees sadly. “But why won’t you let me take this? You can tell the others that it was me and close the case like this.”

Truthfully, he had no intention of kill Nekomaru. The only person he was ever to kill was himself, but he could not tell Gundham that. Not after hearing from him that life was a precious gift and throwing away was a sin toward life itself. Kokichi could agree with him, yet he could not see any disgrace at all in giving his life to save others. It may be against the natural instinct, it may be human arrogance, but he still wanted to do it. He would just leave a suicide note under Chiaki’s door to make sure that Gundham would not misunderstand. He could hate him after, it was only fair.

“I can’t let you do that, in the name of hell.” he simply said.

“Why?” Kokichi was genuinely interested in the answer. He looked straight into Gundham’s eyes.

“While we may be equal in term of power, your duty in this forsaken world is completely different from mine. You are not here for mine, or even yours benefit. Your life belongs to Sonia, Fuyuhiko,
Kazuichi and Rantaro. It’s for them that you have to live.”

Kokichi sighed deeply.

“Your life kinda belongs to Sonia too, you know that?” he whispered.

“Indeed…” he looked away for the first time, lost in his thought. “But she is stronger than you think. She will never give up.”

“I guess this is a goodbye then.” Kokichi got up.

“Return to your room and don’t do anything. I’ll wait a bit longer for my plan.” he picked up a chain. “Expose me after the murder. I won’t ask for anything else.”

Before leaving the room he looked back once more at his friend. Gundham was crouched down, examining a hammer. Regrets were accumulating inside him. He was not going to cry. He would not cry.

He would stay strong and not cry.

He was going to send him off with a smile.

He was not going to cry.

Chapter End Notes

Kokichi and Gundham came from the same reasoning to an opposite solution.

I think that Kokichi is much more similar to Gundham than Nagito, even if he clearly shares similarities with both.

Both Kokichi and Gundham cover themselves with a mantle of illusions and both battle for their own morals no matter what they have to sacrifice. The Kokichi/Kaito situation is a bit similar to this case.

Nagito is more straightforward.

In my opinion at least.
Present Side

A reason to live, a reason to die

It was still pretty early in the morning when he left his room.

He was not going to acknowledge what happened earlier when he woke up, that never happened. What he was going to do was going to the Art Lab and enter. She could be inside all she wanted, he was going to pick the lock and enter. He was going to pry that stupid thing out of her hands, with force if necessary, and burn it to ashes.

He reached the Lab door undisturbed but Yumeno-chan was in front of it. While he was figuring out a way to lure her out of the way Momota-chan’s loud voice came from behind the corner. Kokichi quickly hidden and eavesdropped with impatience as him, Harukawa-chan and Saihara-chan convinced Yumeno-chan to try and open the door for them. Yonaga-chan was not answering, though, not even to her beloved Magician. Just when Harukawa-chan was starting to lose her patience he showed up and proposed to pick the lock for them.

Normally he would realize that this was potentially a fatal mistake, showing that he could enter the Lab at any time, but at that moment he just wanted to enter. Especially since he had a bad feeling about this. Lock-room mysteries are a classic, after all. He crouched on the floor and peeked into the doorknob extracting his tools. It took him only a minute to open the door.

Inside was, unfortunately, exactly what he was afraid of.

Yonaga-chan was lying on her side, blood was creating a circle around her hear soaking her silver hair. While the body discovery announcement was playing he took a look around the room. There were four statues, probably some kind of sculptures, hanged upside-down from their feet with a rope that was tied to the beams on the ceiling. Kokichi grimace looking at the faces of the statues, they were representing the dead people, Amami-chan, Hoshi-chan, Akamatsu-chan and Toujo-chan. Akamatsu-chan’s statue was stabbed with the golden katana that was previously exposed in Shinguji’s Lab.

Everyone arrived and a lot of time was wasted crying and praying to Atua. Kokichi, in the meantime, figured out the dynamic a bit. She was killed with the katana with a stab on the back of her neck, that much was written in the Monokuma File N3. Then the killer stabbed the katana on Akamatsu-chan’s statue and used it to create a lock room mystery. The gold leaf on the handle was, in fact, plastered all over the sliding lock of the back door and the distance between the hanged statue and the lock was just right. So, once he had figured out what happened inside the room the problem was understanding how did the killer enter. As far as he knew only him was capable of performing lockpicking, so it was probably someone that could enter the Lab with ease. Like a member of the Student Council. Kokichi actually was suspecting Shirogane-chan. He didn’t know why but she stroked him as someone that was good at hiding they true intention or intelligence. Kiibo and Yumeno-chan weren’t capable of performing such intricate job. Hanging four statues on the ceiling was no small feat. Well, unless Kiibo had some secrete function or something, but Kokichi didn’t think that possibility as very likely. He had a suspicion that the robot was either the mastermind or an observer of some sort. That inner voice of his was intriguing.

There was another possibility, Yonaga-chan may have opened the door to someone else too. In that case, the killer didn’t need anything special to open the door and had a perfect alibi. That possibility
was the most likely. In that case, the three most likely suspects were Harukawa-chan, Momota-chan and Shingui. Of these he was more convinced of Shingui, in the Monopad was clearly stated that he liked ropes, and of Harukawa-chan, as a killer she had no problem handling ropes, he was sure. Momota-chan had the physique necessary but not much else. He excluded Saihara-chan and Gonta from the very start.

In theory, this all worked well, but finding evidence was much trickier than usual. This was a very well covered crime. He examined the Necronomicon next, apparently you had to prepare an effigy of the person to resurrect and then burn the book and spread the ashes on it. Since the effigies were already completed she was going to burn the book next. There was no fire anywhere in the room, though. He wondered what she was going to use for burning the book. Then he had a flash of inspiration, it was possible that she went out of her Lab to find some fire?

He snapped out of his thoughts when he registered the words that the others were saying. Apparently, Shingui was insisting on performing a séance to talk with Yonaga-chan’s spirit. Why would he propose that, now? Needless to say Yumeno-chan jumped immediately at the opportunity.

“Perfect, we need five people to perform the séance.” Shingui said with his persuasive voice. “Counting me and Himiko we need other three people.”

“I’m coming too!” said Chabashira-chan. “Himiko, I want to help you, I want you to be able to talk to Angie one last time!”

Kokichi was not having a good feeling about leaving two girls alone with that predator. He didn’t like the idea of wasting time with this stuff but it was better for him to go. Saihara-chan was pretty reliable in finding invisible pieces of evidence anyway. The fact that Shingui was so uninterested in the investigation and wanted only to do this thing was pretty suspicious, maybe he would be able to find some evidence while following him. He offered himself as a volunteer, Saihara-chan looked at him with disbelief, and then Kokichi volunteered Kiibo too. He was the most useless in an investigation anyway.

“Very well, it remains to decide where to perform it.” he looked pleased. “We need a place without any light.”

“What about one of the three empty rooms?” proposed Yumeno-chan.

“Seems fine to me, which one?” he asked her.

“Hmmm… the middle one! The middle is always the best!” she answered pointing a finger at him.

“We shall begin the preparation immediately. Please come with me and help me set things up.”

He led them all into his Lab where they grabbed the dog statue and they carried it to the empty room, it was stupidly heavy, they should have asked Gonta to carried it. Then Shingui started drawing a magic circle of a sort on the floor with salt. Kokichi, Kiibo and Chabashira-chan went to the Anthropologist Lab once more to take the iron cage. That was only slightly easier to carry and when they finally reached the séance room Kokichi was already covered in sweat. Inside, Shingui was almost done while Yumeno-chan was looking completely lost.

“You have brought the cage but not the sheet? We need it.”

Shingui sighed like they had been stupid or something. Kokichi was about ready to put him inside the cage and let him there to rot. He didn’t let his emotion show and went inside the Lab once more.
There were already Saihara-chan and Harukawa-chan, examining the katana exhibit case. He picked up the sheet and, since he was not surrounded by fanatics, he decided to take a look at the book that contained the instructions for the séance. Saihara-chan looked interested too so he decided to throw him an invitation for the séance.

“Why don’t you come and see it with your eyes?” he said with his hands behind his head. “We have not started yet, there is still time if you want to join…”

“Go, I think it’s best if someone impartial and rational like you assist at the events, just in case.” Harukawa-chan noted really pragmatically.

“You mean I’m not impartial or rational, Harukawa-chan?!” he faked some tears.

“Right right, I’m going, see you later Maki.”

Saihara-chan grabbed him by the arm and dragged him out of the room. Kokichi was pretty surprised, the Detective was really getting confided, wasn’t he? He could still feel a slight irritation coming from him. Inside the room, Kokichi kicked out the robot without too many pleasantries and then the Anthropologist gave Kokichi and Saihara-chan a paper with the lyrics for the song that was supposed to accompany the whole thing. Then he explained the procedure, they needed a spiritual medium for Yonaga-chan’s spirit. Yumeno-chan offered but Chabashira-chan took her place. She even told her an inspiring speech about taking one's emotions and live them to the fullest.

Chabashira-chan positioned herself inside the magic circle, resting her forehead on a stone that Yumeno-chan found and taking a crouching position. Kokichi and Saihara-chan positioned the cage on top of her, then Shinguji placed the white sheet on top of it. At that point, all of them lifted slowly the dog statue and placed it on top of the covered cage. Lastly, the four of them took each a corner, Shinguji gave the final instructions.

“Tenko, from this point on you mustn’t talk! The next time you speak will be Angie’s spirit.”

“Got it! I’ll see you all after the séance!” she shouted from inside the cage.

“Now,” the Anthropologist continued, “Kokichi and Shuichi, please, turn off the candles next to you, then follow the wall to return to your corner. After the séance is completed you two have to light them again, so be careful. Remember that none of you is allowed to speak.”

They followed the instructions and the room became pitch black. Once they were all in their assigned corners they started to sing the song, in the middle of it some strange sound occurred, Kokichi tried his best to identify it but he couldn’t. Then Shinguji started to call for Yonaga-chan’s spirit. Nothing happened. He called again. Nothing.

“Nye, what’s wrong?” Yumeno-chan’s voice resounded in the dark. “Is Angie not coming?”

“Himiko, I thought I told you to stay silent.” now it was Shinguji’s voice. “But something is wrong… Let’s… light up the candles for now.”

Kokichi didn’t want to believe is gut feeling. He did joke about having a body discovery announcement during the séance. It was a freaking joke. It was not supposed to happen for real. So he was still hoping when he lighted up his candle. Obviously hoping in this place was never a good idea.

Yumeno-chan ran as soon as she saw some red peeking from behind the white sheet. She lifted the cage herself, running on adrenaline, and then screamed the Aikido Master’s name with all her strength. Chabashira-chan was resting on a pool of blood very similar to the one that Yonaga-chan
The body discovery announcement played again and everyone came running. Harukawa-chan was pretty pissed with Saihara-chan but offered her cooperation to solve this case too. Shinguji called Monokuma.

“What are we supposed to do in this case?” he asked him. “Which killer do we need to find?”

“Well, let’s see…” the bear faked a look of contemplation. “I guess it’s first come first served? Assuming that the two of them were killed by two different people you have to find Yonaga Angie’s killer!”

That was a problem. Kokichi had a perfect idea of who killed Chabashira-chan. He knew, there was literally only one person who was in control of the whole thing, and it was the same person that suggested it. He only needed to prove that the chosen room was not important. The rest was very evident, the floorboard below her, which now was misplaced, was known only by one person. The actual method was not exactly fundamental to know.

He could probably prove this by examining one of the other empty rooms.

That had nothing to do with Yonaga-chan’s murder, though.

This was going to be a problem.
Past Side

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

A reason to live, a reason to die

Kokichi did not sleep.

He only lied in his bed, like he was waiting for his death sentence. His feeling of regret was not going anywhere anytime soon. He still strongly felt that he should be the one to take the responsibility, it was even a better bargain, one life instead of two. Nekomaru was gonna die and then Gundham was gonna die. He should have just offered his life instead.

At some point, he heard a terrible rumbling noise, like an earthquake. He closed his eyes and didn’t move. Later Rantaro knocked on his door to wake him up, now he was even making others taking care of him, what a pitiful Leader he was. Together with him, they went down to the tower for the morning roll call. Inside the tower was Nekomaru’s metallic body. He was broken and bent in many places, in strange angles. Kokichi could not look at him, he didn’t want to acknowledge anything that was in the room. He was going to rely on his friend once more because he just could not do this, and he already knew the culprit anyway, so there was no danger of him failing. He asked Rantaro to take care of the investigation in the tower, to take a picture if he found anything interesting. When he heard the ringing of a telephone he took the opportunity immediately and left. He didn’t check the Monokuma File N4 when he heard it bip inside his pocket.

Kokichi was a logical person, not a monster.

Inside the lounge had mysteriously appeared a telephone and it was ringing loudly. When he answered he could hear Fuyuhiko’s voice on the other side.

“Oh, Leader!” he sounded relieved to hear him. “It’s bad, Monokuma informed us but… We can’t come to Strawberry house! The elevator is broken!”

‘I see, Gundham made sure to stay out of the way.’

“This looks bad,” he lied without too much conviction, “Kazu-chan can’t repair it?”

“No, he said that he doesn’t have the parts…” Fuyuhiko sighed loudly. “We are stuck here with Nagito… That bastard looked overjoyed, as usual. Then he disappeared somewhere. Stupid fucker.”

“He disappeared? He went inside the Final Dead Room, didn’t he?” it was his turn to sigh loudly.

“Shit, I didn’t realize… I’m sorry Leader.” he sounded angry at himself.

“Nah, don’t worry. Given his Bullshit he will survive somehow. I’m sure.” he really wasn’t too worried about him, Russian Roulette was probably a walk in the park for him.

Kokichi lied to reassure Fuyuhiko, he said that he was going to investigate and discover the culprit. Then Monokuma would surely find a way to make them all reunited for the confrontation. He concluded the call and he plopped down on a sofa with a heavy sigh. He was massaging his temples when he saw Chiaki peeking out of the corner.
“Am I a bother?” she asked gently. “Monokuma gave us some food, I thought you would want some.” she placed some bread and milk on the table in front of him and smiled sweetly. “I don’t think you did it, but you feel responsible, don’t you? Rest for a bit, me and Rantaro will take care of things there.”

She bowed a little bit and then walked away. Kokichi slowly ate, after three days of complete starvation the bread tasted delicious but he was not happy at all. The price for that bread had been just too high. After he spent more than ten minutes feeling sorry for Gundham, Nekomaru and for himself he realized just how selfish he was being. He had to be there for the others, he had to be the strongest one! He jumped to his feet and stretched, the bread was grounding him again. He was about to leave the lounge when he heard a voice he didn’t particularly want to hear.

“Good morning Leader!” Nagito was smiling like always. “It’s been only a little but for some reason, it feels like an eternity since I last saw you!”

“Yeah, right,” he dismissed him, “do you have something important to say or—“

“Actually,” he interrupted him for the first time, “I do. For once I would really like if you would just shut up and let others speak.”

The tone, the mannerism and the expression that Nagito was addressing him was so different from anything he ever saw or heard that the only thing he could do was stare with his mouth opened.

“Ohh, thank you.” he smiled again, his mood swings were making Kokichi’s head spin. “Now, I’ve been in the Final Dead Room and I’ve gotten some interesting rewards. Like the possibility to see the Funhouse structure for example.” he looked at him with a penetrating gaze for a bit. “Ah, you’re not surprised. Not by this neither by the fact that I’ve appeared here even if the elevator is broken. You already knew everything. Are you the culprit?”

Kokichi wanted to kick himself, what a terrible mistake. He clearly was not in his right mind at the moment, this mistake was just too big. Still, there was no possibility of getting the culprit wrong this time, so it didn’t really matter. Nagito was a pain in the ass, though, he would surely do something devious with this information.

“Well, don’t you want to know my other reward?” he was clearly baiting him. “I’ve played the game on max difficulty, Monokuma told me that I was the only one to do that, so you can’t know this.”

“Max difficulty?” he was confused, was there even a difficulty setting on Russian Roulette?

“Yeah, basically instead of loading one bullet and leaving the rest empty, I’ve loaded five bullets and left one empty!” he said it like he was commenting a fun fact that happened to him during a normal day. “Thanks to my good luck I was able to be useful for once. I’ve got a reward no one else got!” he looked extremely proud of himself.

“Alright, what is it?” he decided to take the bait.

“Hmmm…” Nagito faked a pensive look but he had a smile that betrayed the fact that he was only making fun of him. “Do I really have to tell you? It’s my prize after all.”

“Do whatever you want.” Kokichi was really not in the mood for this.

The two of them head back to the tower in silence, once they reached the others Nagito started giving orders around and treating them like they were a bunch of idiots. Kokichi was shocked by his new attitude. What had gotten into him? Suddenly, the tower door opened and Kazuichi, Fuyuhiko and Gundham emerged from the long corridor.
“Puhuhu! Sorry for the wait! I had to repair the elevator.” Monokuma snickered. “Now that you are all together you can start the debate! Have fun!”

So they did, Kokichi isolated himself a little from the others. He observed them from a distance. Rantaro and Chiaki were a good team, they collaborated to exclude some causes of death. Nagito ruined immediately the atmosphere. He started to shoot down all their theories mercilessly and he treated them like idiots. Nagito revealed that the structure of the Funhouse was different from what they were thinking and that it was fundamental to understand how Nekomaru was killed. Kokichi had not figured out exactly how Gundham killed him and refused to try, so he kept silent even when Rantaro sent him a wordless request for help. Gundham took the situation in his hands.

“So they did, Kokichi isolated himself a little from the others. He observed them from a distance. Rantaro and Chiaki were a good team, they collaborated to exclude some causes of death. Nagito ruined immediately the atmosphere. He started to shoot down all their theories mercilessly and he treated them like idiots. Nagito revealed that the structure of the Funhouse was different from what they were thinking and that it was fundamental to understand how Nekomaru was killed. Kokichi had not figured out exactly how Gundham killed him and refused to try, so he kept silent even when Rantaro sent him a wordless request for help. Gundham took the situation in his hands.

“Nekomaru was killed by the Ultimate Weapon! Look no further! Here I am, the individual worthy of the name Ultimate Weapon!” he shouted theatrically.

“No, you are far more than that!” Sonia smiled at him enthusiastically. “You have your Four Dark Devas of Destruction with you!”

“I-I see…” Gundham covered his face with his scarf, red as a tomato.

Everyone ignored Gundham confession. Kokichi almost started crying. All of them together put their mind to solve the mystery of the Funhouse structures. Nagito ridiculed all their ideas all the while, he was behaving like he was the only person with a useful brain. Kokichi was going to do something about that, later. In the end, Chiaki and Rantaro successfully pieced together the whole mystery and how the culprit killed Nekomaru was clear. Gundham tied him and used the strange elevator function in the tower to hang him high and kill him using simply gravity. His plan was really a masterpiece, so complicated and convoluted.

Then the difficult part finally started. Once the method was clear only the identity of the culprit remained to find. The crime happened a night and all of them were potential suspects. Then Kazuichi mentioned a clock ringing through the lunge of the Grape house and the fact that only Nagito didn’t appear in the lounge to check.

“I didn’t come because I couldn’t.” he smiled with confidence.

“Liar!” Kazuichi yelled pointing at him. “You weren’t in your room, were you?! Where were you?! You killed Nekomaru, right?”

“However…” Sonia was looking uncomfortable. “I didn’t hear the rumbling noise either…”

“Yeah, me either…” Chiaki frowned.

“What?!” Kazuichi was losing his composure. “How it’s this possible?! All the others heard it right?”

Rantaro and Kokichi was losing his composure. “How it’s this possible?! All the others heard it right?”

Rantaro and Kokichi nodded, Gundham looked away. Kokichi connected the dots at that moment. Nagito, Sonia and Chiaki, together with Gundham, had the deluxe rooms. There was the possibility that those rooms were insulated from sounds better than the others. Nagito called Monokuma and asked him. It was really like that, the three of them could not have heard the sound. Nagito already knew it from the start, that’s why he was so sure earlier. When did he have a private talk with Monokuma? However, this was a proof of guilty for Gundham.

“Wait…” Rantaro was the one to bring it up. “Wasn’t Gundham in a deluxe room too? How did he hear the clock in the lounge?”

“I just happened to go to the bathroom.” Gundham calmly answered. “The world is always so simple.”
Kokichi was not going to force him to confess or anything, he could take all the time he needed. Nagito had a different idea. He accused him openly and started to summarize the case, Gundham interrupted him when Nagito said that he attacked Nekomaru in his sleep without giving him the opportunity to fight.

“YOU! You are saying that I didn’t fight?!” he was really pissed. Kokichi started to feel the tears stinging his eyes, Gundham had just openly admitted his crime. “Maybe I’m just a human destined for hell, but I can’t finish just yet. I’ll shatter those delusions of yours! Don’t you dare say I didn’t fight!”

“Wait, please wait!” Sonia yelled, scared. “What are you saying Gundham?! If you talk like that it seems that you are the culprit!”

“But it’s truuuuue!” Monokuma, who was still around after Nagito called him, snickered covering his mouth with his paws. “The culprit for this case is indeed… Tanaka Gundham!”

Kokichi closed his eyes when he saw Gundham smiled. He focused only on his satisfied voice excluding all the other noises.

“Victory can only be built upon a foundation of corpses! You cannot find peace without sacrifice anything! Now, trample this life! Trample it as though it was mere trash on the side of the road! Pull the curtain strings of this worthless performance with your own two hands!” he laughed loudly.

“Well then, it’s time for the execution!” Monokuma was having the time of his life.

“No, wait!” Sonia was crying. “I can’t accept this unless I hear it directly from his mouth!”

“Why do you want to talk to the one that has lost?” Gundham’s voice was quiet, Kokichi had never heard him using this tone. “The loser merely leaves, it would be unnecessary for me to say something. But for honor sake, I shall correct one thing! That guy said that I made Nekomaru powerless without fighting him... That, however, is a great mistake. Nekomaru did fight, and because he fought, he lost and died. If he was trying to cling to life, there were ways he could have done so. Within the Final Dead Room I discovered the secret of the Funhouse, and I devise a killing plan with that secret... I successfully lured Nekomaru in the tower alone and then he sensed my subtle intent to kill and understood the situation. If he wanted to run away, it would have been easy for him to do so. Instead, he chose to fight me. He was serious too, he gave his best and tried to kill me. If I had died the mystery would have been even more complicated.”

"Even if both sides agreed it was still wrong." Sonia was heartbroken.

“Humph, I'll not force my values upon you. However, what's the point of living if you're just waiting until you finally die? There is nothing courageous about that. That is a mere feeling of abandonment! Ever since we were locked inside this building everyone had been dominated by that feeling of resignation. Giving up on life... That's just an insult to life itself! Have you ever heard of the term "dog eat dog"? In zoology, cannibalism is a common phenomenon... If you say killing for the sake of living is "evil" then what do you call giving up on life itself? If a world would consider that justice, then I'll fight that world with every fiber of my being. Giving up on life and choosing death is a blasphemy toward life itself! It's a violation of the natural order! The arrogance of humanity! Nekomaru had the courage to die when he needed to die. Regardless... As I've said I have no intention of forcing my values upon you guys. I've betrayed you all, that's the truth. But don't you think that's a better alternative than starve to death here?”

"And your belief is why you committed your crime... Did you do the Life-Threatening Game too?" Chiaki’s voice was really quiet too.
“Humph, compared to Nekomaru's battle that was merely child's play.” he answered.

"The fact that you admit your crime so easily, and Leader didn't do much...” Chiaki looked at him, Kokichi tried to cover his tears but it was too late. She smiled at him. “You two were in this together, right? Did you two decided to sacrifice yourselves?"

“I can’t believe you would ask such foolish question. Just who do you think I am?!“ Gundham covered for him. “My name is Gundham Tanaka, history's greatest monster! My cursed existence is feared by all mankind! There is no way I'd sacrifice myself for the sake of you fools! Not is a million, not in a billion years! In the name of Pandaemonium, it's impossible!

"Is that it? Then I’ll just leave it at that.” her smile was really sweet.

“Now then, let us be rid of this foolish talk! Monokuma, let us begin!” suddenly his four hamsters came out of his scarf and cuddled around him. “What is it, my Four Dark Devas of Destruction? Are you worried about me? Oh, my feared Dark Devas of Destruction, that's not like you at all... There is no need to fear... In this world, I'm only a temporary visitor... I was simply visiting for a moment... now that my duty is complete, I must return to the darkness...” his voice was so sweet and comforting that Kokichi's heart broke into a million pieces. Sonia was in a similar situation.

"Please, I beg of you, don’t do this…” she was crying and she could barely talk.

“Sonia, an act as unrefined as stopping a man from going to his death... does not befit a noble such as yourself.” He stood in front of her and gently took her hands in his. The four hamsters went into her palms. “I’m leaving them to you, my Dark Lady. Your spirit of generosity will keep them safe, but don’t pamper them, they get fat easily.”

He let go of her hands and she hugged the hamsters to her chest. Then he turned and went to stand in front of Kokichi. Kokichi wiped a tear but didn’t try to hide them, at this point, it was really useless.

“What are you crying for, my Dark Lord?” he asked gently, Kokichi shook his head.

"I'm just honored that I got to meet you, Gundham." he reserved him his most bright smile yet.

“The same goes for me, my Lord.”

He extended his hand and Kokichi shook it. That handshake was the first real proof that they considered each other as equals and it was their goodbyes too.

"Wherever you end up, I hope is the world you wish for," Kokichi bowed his head a little.

“If it's not, I'm just going to make it be.” Gundham was confident.

"Right.” they let go.

“And that is why, until the very end...” Gundham stood in the middle of the tower with his arms wide open. “Pride! Conceit! Courage! Insolence! Fearful of nothing! Daunted by nothing! Let us laugh uproarly! That is Gudham Tanaka! I shall stick with my evil until the very end! Open Sesame, Pandaemonium! I shall fill hell with true hell! FUHAHAHAHAHA!”

His voice resonated through the whole room embracing them all with his special power. The room walls exploded without any sound like they were made of paper. Gundham disappeared and reappeared farther away, in a vast, empty sandy field. Monokuma, leading a pack of buffaloes, charged towards him and Gundham was sent flying. Kokichi didn’t want to look but he owed him to look until the very end. Gundham landed on the ground several feet away and didn’t move anymore.
Kokichi took some deep breathes trying to calm himself and recollect his feelings that were all over the place. A voice came from behind him.

“Finally, this farce is finished.”

Chapter End Notes

Gundham's speech is completely copied from the canon, I like it so much, it gets me every time.
It's probably the moment I feel the most in all three games.
I can't help but look at him in awe every time.

For Kokichi this is like Gonta's death, only different.

We are getting close to the end of the Past.
Present Side

Hate

He left the séance room and tried one of the other two.

On first sight the room appeared totally normal, it seemed like no one entered it in like forever, but Kokichi knew better than let himself be fooled by appearance. He was making his way to the center when a floorboard under his foot suddenly yielded under his weight. The scare clutched his stomach and he fell right through the gap, he tried to grab something out of reflex and ended up completely losing his balance, he hit his head in a corner of the floorboard next to him.

He lost consciousness. Kokichi was unable to tell for how much time he lied on the ground in the dark under the wooden floor. When he regain the ability to move he climbed up again, his face was covered in blood. Kokichi knew that head wounds tend to bleed a lot even if they were not particularly serious. He had not enough knowledge or lucidity to say whatever his wound was serious or not.

He made his way out of the room really slowly, his head was spinning but he was not feeling much pain, strangely enough. He could hear voices inside the séance room so he must not have been out for long. Feeling too dizzy to really do anything and not wanting to enter the room full of annoying people he just lied down on the spot. The floor was pleasantly cool against his cheek. He just waited for the dizziness to go away while he was collecting his thoughts. His theory had been confirmed, he knew for a fact who Chabashira-chan’s killer was. Yet he had not a single decisive clue for Yonaga-chan’s killer. Was it possible that is was Shinguji for both? Maybe.

He should have tried and investigated some more, but he really didn’t want to get up. Staying there was so much easier… He almost fell asleep until the door opened and Saihara-chan, accompanied by a frowning Harukawa-chan, gasped when he saw him. Only then he realized that lying like that on the floor, head covered in blood, was a bad idea. In absence of a better excuse, he went for a joke.

“’T’s a lie!”

He yelled raising his head and then jumping to his feet. The sudden movement sent another wave of dizziness through him but he ignored it. Harukawa-chan sent him a pricing glare, she was probably hoping that he would actually drop dead right there. Saihara-chan’s panicked look slowly changed into one of confusion.

“What… are you doing?” he asked hesitantly.

“Oh, this?” Kokichi passed a hand through his dirty hair. “I tripped and fell through a floorboard! Looked like the crosspiece supporting it was cut! How strange!” he laughed like an idiot.

Saihara-chan’s expression lost all hints of worry and he started to immerse himself in thoughts. He probably figured out the rooms trick. Good. Then the Detective seemed to catch himself and his expression opened in irritation.

“What were you doing on the floor like that?” he asked him with a severe tone.

“Isn’t it obvious? I was waiting so I could pull a joke on you!” he put his hands behind his head before remembering that it was a bad idea.
He stumbled a little. Deciding that it would be too humiliating to faint in front of them he wobbly made his way down the stairs while the announcement played. He reached his dorm room and put his head under the running water in the sink. The blood flushed away and he started shivering from his damp hair. He partially dried himself using a towel and then reached the shrine of judgment. He didn’t want to know what the bear would do if he didn’t show up as soon as possible.

During the elevator ride and while he was positioning himself in his podium he realized something strange. He was feeling dizzy, weak and cold, but he was not feeling any pain from the wound. Memory manipulation is one thing, but there was no way that his memory could influence something tangible like the pain from a fresh wound. He felt a shiver down his spine that had nothing to do with his wet hair.

Could he not trust even his own body?

The trial started and not surprisingly Harukawa-chan accused him since he could open the Art Lab door with lock picking. Tired and in bad humor he decided to be even more obnoxious than usual.

“Aw, you got me! Yeah, I’m the culprit!” he said cheerfully.

While he was staring at her to engrave in his memory her annoyed expression he saw with the corner of his eye Saihara-chan sigh and massage his forehead.

“Then tell me, mister culprit,” his tone heavily sarcastic, “how did you leave the room after murdering Yonaga-san?”

Kokichi knew what he wanted to do. He wanted to prove that Kokichi didn’t know the actual trick behind the lock room mystery. Too bad for him, though. He knew.

“Ah, I positioned the katana in Akamatsu-chan’s effigy and then used the motion of the unwinding rope to hit the sliding lock and closed it.” he smiled broadly. “I’m a genius, aren’t I?”

Saihara-chan stared at him with his mouth opened clearly taken aback.

“Well then, case closed.” said Harukawa-chan imperturbable.

“What are you doing?” Saihara-chan’s tone was indignant. “I’m trying to prove your innocence, why are you digging your own grave?!?”

Kokichi could only laugh loudly. Why would he want to prove his innocence, seriously? The thought was simply ridiculous. He was clearly the most suspicious one, no doubt about that. The Detective should be overjoyed to have such a rare opportunity being shoved at him!

“Let’s leave that alone for a while,” Saihara-chan sighed. “Besides Ouma-kun the most suspicious would be the Student Council members. They were the only ones that could access to her Lab.”

The debate reached a dead end when they realized that there were no alibis to confirm, no way to prove anything. It was the same problem that Kokichi had. More than solve this problem, though, he absolutely wanted to address the fact that Shinguji was Chabashira-chan’s killer. It may not be paramount for the trial but he could not allow an assassin to go free. So, when Yumeno-chan started talking about Chabashira-chan's case he caught the opportunity and started to antagonize her strongly. He knew that if he were to agree with her the others would be even less inclined to cooperate, due to their dislike of him, so by antagonizing her and make her a poor victim, the others would be more inclined to help her. And there was a little hypocrisy that he wanted to address, too.

“You didn’t give two shits about her when she was alive,” he attacked her, “and now you're all ‘Oh,
no! Poor Tenko!’ Now that she is dead!”

“Nye, I knew you all would feel like that, but I wish I had made up with her while I had the chance. Now my words can’t reach her anymore… It’s too late, it’s too late…” she looked really down.

“Yeah seriously! It’s way too late to realize that!” surprisingly it was Momota-chan that criticize her. “So, the only thing you can do now is live your life facing forward, for her sake too!”

In the end, they all bounded together to cheer up the Magician and then preceded to examine Chabashira-chan’s murder. Kokichi didn’t say much, Saihara-chan was in control of things. He only jumped in when Harukawa-chan started to blabber about suicide. Him doing a hopeful speech was simply not happening so he decided to exaggerate a little to make everyone realize that it was really out of character for her to commit suicide in such a convoluted way.

“So, she committed suicide and made it look like a homicide to kill us all. She wanted to drag us down with her. Well, she probably wanted only Yumeno-chan to die with her, but still.”

“Don’t be ridiculous!” Momota-chan, the savior of the weak and lost, came to the rescue once again. “There is no way she would do something so terrible and selfish!”

That was why idiots like him were so easy to manipulate. They blindly believed that everyone was seeing the world the same way they did. He was feeling a little irritated by his exaggerated faith.

“People can lie about how malicious they real intents really are, you know?” he taunted him.

“Geez, you really are a naïve dude.” he sighed melodramatically. “We are all just people you know? Of course, we have some secrets, what matter is if there is some malice behind it!”

Kokichi was stunned. Naïve? Him? The most distrusting person alive? The individual that was much closer to an Ultimate Faithless than an Ultimate Supreme Leader? For some stupid, inexplicable reason he felt somewhat flattered.

“Naïve? No one ever called my naïve before. And from Momota-chan? Seriously?” his tone lacked the mockery that he was trying to convey.

“Yeah! So what’s important is whatever I want to believe in someone! In the end, if you get betrayed is not their fault, it’s your fault for believing in them!”

‘You are not making any goddam sense, seriously!’

“Well, we come from different backgrounds, let’s just agree to disagree.” he concluded the discussion.

Once the hypothesis of suicide was ruled out they quickly solved the dynamics of the murder and Shinguji blamed Yumeno-chan. Luckily, Saihara-chan wasn’t as stupid as some other people there and he explained how Kokichi got hurt, and how the other rooms were tricked as well. Shinguji was easily spotted from all this mess and Chabashira-chan’s murder was solved.

The Anthropologies fought, but not that much, he admitted his defeat and claimed that it didn’t matter because the real goal of this class trial was to define Yonaga-chan’s killer and not Chabashira-chan’s. It was true and it made Kokichi very mad. He did not care if the creepy guy was not going to get executed by Monokuma, he would make sure that he would pay for this. Even if he didn’t like all that much the little cultist girl there were no excuses for killing her. None.

Looking at Shinguji’s relaxed face made his blood boil.
He could not remember ever hating a person more than this.
Past Side

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Hate

Kokichi could not remember ever hating a person more than this.

“Finally, this farce is finished.” was Nagito’s comment to Gundham’s execution.

He wanted to strangle him, right there and now. It was lucky that Monokuma allowed them to leave the Funhouse, finally, and return to their cottages. He was not sure he would have been able to resist the temptation otherwise. With too many emotions in his heart, he was completely unable to sleep. He just spent the night with his face pressed on the pillow, devoid of any strength to move, bracing himself to avoid end up in pieces.

The next morning the hunger was just too fierce to ignore so he went to the dining room. It was still very early and he immediately regretted his decision to go there. Nagito was waiting for him looking completely at ease. Before he could decide if he wanted to go away, strangle him or insult him Nagito spoke.

“There is this novel I like. You follow a girl who is investigating some murder cases.” this topic was completely random and Kokichi was taken by surprise. “Then you reach the ending and surprise, surprise! The culprit was the girl all along. The novel is supposed to project the reader into the girl, but the girl is actually the killer. It’s like the culprit was inside us all along! What do you think of novels like that?” he was looking at him expectantly, like this was some sort of test.

It probably was, but whatever point he was trying to make it was completely lost on him. Kokichi could only feel his irritation grow. He opened his mouth to insult him when Rantaro cheerfully greeted him entering the restaurant, his voice lost his glee as soon as he saw Nagito. Rantaro put a hand on Kokichi’s shoulder, effectively calming him a bit. One by one the others joined them and all of them made an uncomfortable expression after noticing Mr. Bullshit.

“Well then, now that we are all here I have an announcement to make.” Nagito faced all of them. “I won’t allow this stupid farce to continue any further. I’m going to expose the mastermind and end this game tomorrow.”

“Yeah, how nice.” Kokichi mocked him. “How will you manage such an amazing feat?” his voice was full of sarcasm.

“It’s easy really.” he was smiling calmly. “I’ve placed bombs through all the islands and tomorrow at midday I’m going to make them all explode. That’s it… Unless the mastermind comes out of hiding and takes responsibility for this. You are free to try and expose them if you want, I can’t wait to see what you all can do. I’m really curious… What can a bunch of frauds like you do?”

“What did you just say, you fucking bastard?!” Fuyuhiko and Kazuichi were not having any of this. “How dare you call us frauds?!”

Nagito just smiled a little more and then left the restaurant. It was Monomi’s turn to appear.
“Everyone! This is an emergency!” she yelled.

“You just shut up, you stupid rabbit!” Kazuichi was furious. “You didn’t help us at all! Don’t expect us to believe anything you say!”

Kokichi took the situation in his hands and asked them to go and investigate the islands to find the bombs. He remained behind with the white rabbit that was crying her eyes out.

“I really wanted to help everyone…” she was sobbing uncontrollably. “Even my secret diary got stolen…”

“Monomi,” he called her, “do you know who the traitor is? The mastermind?”

“H-hmm…” she stopped crying and started to sweat. “It’s not what you think… they are not your enemy…”

“We can talk about that later, now tell me who it is!” he ordered her.

She started to scream apologies and then she disappeared like always. She was seriously useless. Kokichi tied to think of something that would reveal the traitor identity but the more he thought the less he was inclined to believe that a traitor was really among them. He trusted all of them. They were all his friends.

Later that day they reunited only to discover that none of them could find the bombs. Either they were hidden really well or they never existed in the first place. After two nights of lack of sleep even if he was tense and worried he just slept like a log. The morning came and he was determined to beat up Nagito until he spoke. He was smaller than him but he didn’t care anymore about getting hurt, his limit had been reached days ago. When he entered the restaurant he found Fuyuhiko waiting for him.

“Leader! I’ve found them!” he was agitated. “I could not sleep so I searched some more… I’m sure they were not there yesterday, the bastard must have placed them tonight with the darkness!”

They knocked on the others’ door and after a moment of panic, everyone rushed to the island where the Funhouse had been placed. There was a new building, Kokichi didn’t even bother feeling surprised. He had already accepted that this was not the real world some time ago. The building looked like a factory, right outside of it was a truck with what looked indeed bombs loaded in its back. Kazuichi, showing an unsuspected brave side, rushed to examine them.

“They are real! They are attached to this thing!” he pointed at something that looked like a computer.

They got closer and the laptop switched on without any help. A video started to play automatically, Nagito was speaking to them through it.

-Ah, you were able to find the bombs, but it’s useless. The only way to stop the blast is by sweeping the mastermind’s handbook in this device. Have you figured out who it is yet?- The video stopped and they all started to curse at him in frustration. Chiaki, the only one that was not perturbed at all, took her handbook from her backpack and swept it without hesitation. The device biped and then a second video started to play.

-Obviously, since I don’t know the identity of the mastermind I can’t know if the handbook that was swept is the correct one! You should have realized that sooner, are you all stupid? Well, I’m waiting inside the factory. Come and tell me if the mastermind decided to reveal itself!-

Kokichi understood that is was a trap, he and Chiaki tried to stop Kazuichi and Fuyuhiko but they
were too angry to listen. Fuyuhiko tried to open the door but it was opening only a little, he kicked it
with all his strength and anger. The door opened but a huge fire started and spread fast.

Sonia, who had apparently explored the factory a bit the day prior, guided them all to a storage room
were some fire grenades were stored. They all returned back and threw the fire grenades inside. The
grenades did absolutely nothing to subdue the fire. Monokuma appeared and made them all go away,
then he activated the sprinklers and in a couple minutes the factory was smoking weakly. They
marched inside and were greeted by a horrifying sight.

Nagito was laying facing the ceiling, he was tied up, with a knife stabbed through his right hand, a
spear through his stomach and he was covered in wounds. He was dead.

It took Kokichi some time to fully comprehend the situation. Nagito had always been such a pain in
the ass that it was difficult to really believe that he was dead. Gone. Murdered. Who had done it? It
was really a gruesome display of cruelty. Was any of his friends even capable of something like this?
Well, Fuyuhiko was a Yakuza, but he was pretty sure that he had never done anything violent with
his own hands.

Monokuma cheerfully distributed the Monokuma File N5 and disappeared snickering. Kokichi
pulled up his hood and immediately went into his investigation mood. This time he had no problem
 whatsoever, sure, it was a horrible death, but he was too fed up with him to really care. The
immediate impression was that he had been tortured for information, probably about the bombs. The
problem was that the duct tape was covered in blood and clean underneath. Basically, his mouth was
covered before the torture started. That made no sense. Then it was not torture, maybe just a big
grudge against him. They wanted to kill him as painfully as possible.

Things got complicated when he realized that his palm was clean, the back of his hand had blood
until the knuckles. He had been gripping something. Searching nearby he saw that the spear had a
long cord covered in blood, except for a very small portion, of the size of a fist. Why was Nagito
gripping the cord of the spear? He looked around and noticed that Chiaki was looking at the ceiling
with a concentrated expression.

“Chi-chan? What are you looking at?” he asked her.

She pointed at the ceiling without answer, he looked up and he noticed a vertical trace of blood on a
beam. The cord of the spear. The spear was suspended up above Nagito, he had used the cord and
his grip to keep it in place. Basically, Nagito died when he let go of the spear which fell on him. A
crazy possibility was forming in his mind. He checked the surrounding of the body, there was a line
of cardboard from the door leading to a curtain. Under it, he found a lighter.

Kokichi wanted to laugh. The bastard set up this entire thing. The fire, the spear… He took another
look, Nagito’s right hand was tied to a burned rope. The rope, though, was burned too close to his
sleeve and it was too far from the curtains. There was no way such a big rope was burned by a small
fire that had not burned the sleeve. That hand was never tied up in the first place. Had he started a
fire with the only purpose to hide that the rope had been burned in advance?

Disregarding the knife for a moment he thought this through. With his right hand, Nagito was
capable of tiding himself up and stab himself with the knife. Then he found a plushy with a hole in
his stomach and blood all over it. Did Nagito placed the knife in the hole and then stabbed his hand
through it? This was so stupidly crazy that made perfect sense.

Happy and proud of himself he explained the case to everyone. They were shocked but happy, this
case was going to be solved without any more causalities. Kokichi called the bear, ready to confirm
his theory.
“Puhuhu!” the bear was laughing with his paws on his mouth. “Are you really sure that you want to end this here?”

Kokichi was taken aback. The bear normally jumped at the opportunity to end the discussion, he always happily confirmed the culprit without hesitation. Why this time he was asking him if he was sure?

Because it was wrong.

A wave of fear grabbed his heart, he frantically stopped the bear and asked him more time. Then he tried to think about what he was missing, his mind thrown out of the loop. Luckily Chiaki had a good idea, the Monokuma File didn’t specify any cause of death. It was pretty obvious that it was the spear, though, right?

“Everyone! I want to help this time!” Monomi dropped from the ceiling. “Please, listen to me! You have to investigate Nagito’s cottage! There is something important in there!”

“My, my, my adorable little sister!” Monokuma grabbed her by the ear. “Don’t interfere!”

Kokichi didn't have any better idea so he exchanged a glance with Chiaki who nodded, all of them went into Nagito’s cottage. The door was open. The first thing that caught their attention inside the room was a small refrigerator. He opened it, it was empty except for a small bottle. They all peeked from behind him to read the label.

-Monokuma’s special poison. For killing only!

Extremely lethal, it becomes steam when in contact with the air.

Conserve in plastic or glass-

‘How is this useful? Nagito could have died by poisoning but how? The container was here, how could have he spread the---’

As the realization hit him his body froze, he never thought that he could feel any more hate for Nagito.

He was wrong.

Chapter End Notes

This part is a bit rushed, I'm sorry.
The next chapter of the Past Side will cover the end of the whole game, it may not feel as epic as the end of the game but there was simply no way for me to adapt that concept here. So it will be a calm explanation of this universe concept.
From there all the questions will be answered bit by bit.
“No, wait a moment Shinguji-kun. There is still something that we need to discuss.”

Saihara-chan’s voice snapped him out of his thoughts. Was he going to pull another impressive evidence out of his pocket, like always?

“Under the floor, distant from where Chabashira-san was killed there was another trace of blood, but it was dried, it was older than her’s.” he explained.

Kokichi needed only a moment to connect the dots, now everything made sense.

“It was not Chabashira-chan’s blood?” he subtly tried to help. “Then who’s?”

“It was Yonaga-san’s blood.” Saihara-chan answered. “I strongly suspect that she was killed right there, in the séance room, or maybe not killed but surely attacked.”

“I see! So she left her Lab, went to the séance room, surprised the killer while he was preparing the trick to kill Chabashira-chan and he attacked her!” he summarized.

“Yes, that’s what I believe.” Saihara-chan agreed with him. “She was searching for a candle, she needed fire to burn the Necronomicon and complete the ritual. She probably heard the culprit tamper with the floorboards and got curious enough to take a peek inside. Then the culprit had to silence her. The only person that had the motive and the opportunity to be there is you, Shinguji Korekiyo!”

Kokichi was really curious to know how could a person feel the need to kill two people. He could understand Yonaga-chan’s murder, but why kill Chabashira-chan too? While he was trying to understand Shinguji completely lost it.

He uncovered his mouth, his lips had pink lipstick on, and started to talk to himself in two different voices.

The Anthropologist fought a desperate battle that held no meaning, no one was going to be convinced by his lies. The vote was cast and the result was no surprise. The creepy, crazy guy regained his composure and admitted defeat. He started to explain his ‘motive’, if one could consider that a motive. He didn’t kill for the Necronomicon, the ritual, revenge or even for his freedom. He killed for a dead sister.

Kokichi recalled his Motive Video, finally it made sense. The guy, clearly mentally unstable, was convinced that he had to kill as many nice girls as possible to send them as friends to his dead sister. Who apparently was his lover, too. Kokichi didn’t even bother with that. He then started a philosophical speech about the importance to accept death and some other stupid crap about watching them forever as a ghost.

After two killers that somehow managed to get everyone forgiveness in the end, well almost everyone at least, they were, for the first time, forced to accept that sometimes death had no meaning at all. And forgiveness was nowhere to be found.

The execution followed the general sentiment until the very end. Shinguji was literally melted into a boiling pot and then his spirit, yes, his spirit, was exorcized with salt. Not only it was nonsensical at maximum level, it was very surreal too. Kokichi could not accept that as an actual thing, it was a
He was brought back to reality by a much more concrete problem. Yumeno-chan, having lost all the moral support from her friends and having spent all the adrenaline in the trial, looked like she was just about ready to give up on life completely. Her face was pale and darkened, her eyes had no light. “Let’s just give her some space…” was saying Saihara-chan.

When he saw the others agree with him he almost lost his patience once and for all. They were always talking about friendship and cooperation and yet when it counted the most they were all quick to turn their backs.

“Yumeno-chan is such a liar!” he said cheerfully. “You know, personally I don’t think that lies are exactly a bad thing… We would have no free will if the world was composed only of truth. But, lying to yourself is really not a good thing!”

“What are you saying!” Shirogane-chan yelled at him. “Think about her feelings for a little!”

Kokichi could feel everyone creating holes in his face with their stares. Those dimwits would not be able to recognize psychology even if you were to slap them with it. He kept his gaze on Yumeno-chan.

“I’m saying this because I thought about her feelings!” his tone was harsh. “Yumeno-chan has been lying to herself about her feelings so she’s been holding back. Hey, what are you repressing? What are you trying so hard to hold back?”

Almost immediately after he finished talking, tears were running on the girl’s face. They started to flow more and more until the girl was shaken by intense sobs.

“Tenko, Angie… I’m so lonely!” she was screaming and crying with all her strength. “I’m so lonely without you two!”

Her legs did not support her anymore and she collapsed on the ground screaming. Everyone gathered around her and patted her on the back, on the head and on the shoulders. Most of them started to cry as well. Kokichi felt his heart tight and his eyes stinging for a moment but he rejected it all, he started to make his way toward the elevator to put some distance between himself and the others. When he stole a glance in their direction he was surprised to meet eyes with Saihara-chan. Apparently, the Detective was observing him. Saihara-chan nodded briefly before turning to face Yumeno-chan again.

After some time the Magician fell asleep and Gonta picked her up and carried her into the elevator. They all rode it and emerged in the night of the shrine of judgment. Kokichi could feel from time to time a gaze on his back and he knew who that was. He distanced himself from the conversation they were having about the sleeping girl and slowly he blended in the surrounding greenery. He sat on the ground near the benches and waited for all of them to go back to their dorm rooms.

He heard someone coughing. Near the benches, Momota-chan was looking at his hand with an angry expression. Kokichi sharpened his sight to see what he was looking at and he saw some red fall from his fingers. Momota-chan wiped his face and disappear into the dormitory. Kokichi went to see what the red thing was. He crouched on the ground and put a finger in the red substance. It smelled of blood.

With a grimace, he quickly went to wash his hand on the sink nearby. What was that? Was he wounded? Poisoned? Sick? He had a bad constitution since the start of the whole resurrecting ritual
but this hardly had anything to do with it. He was going to keep a closer eye on him from now on. He went on the back of the building and added another part of the message on the stone, hidden in the grass. The kidnappers were going to fear him, he was going to make everyone escape and then find some way to expose the accomplice of the other bastards that were keeping everyone trapped. He entered his room and with a sigh he changed the position of Yonaga-chan’s, Chabashira-chan’s and the psycho’s pictures and positioned in the ‘killer victim’ area of the board.

He didn’t sleep well that night, he had some kind of nightmare but he could not remember it. It was infuriating, he was feeling like he had the answers to everything in his reach and he could not grasp them. He took his time getting ready and went in the dining room determined to make some progress. He was going to speak with Iruma-chan later, that girl needed to step up her game before they were all dead.

During breakfast he was relieved to see that his little manipulation worked, Yumeno-chan was much more lively than before. As usual, Gonta delivered the new message to the others.

They were starting to guess the first half correctly but they were not even close on the second. Momota-chan asked that the person that was making this prank would take responsibility and fess up. Kokichi was not going to confess in a million years, he either was going to finish the message and there would be no need or to leave it unfinished forever.

As always after a trial, the damn bear-robot appeared and gave them the prize. This time it was a brush and a strange blue stone. All of Kokichi’s attention, though, was caught when the stupid bear announced the next motive.

‘Already?!’

It was a card key. Kokichi wanted it. Immensely. Not only because he could not trust any of them with it, but especially because he wanted to use it and discover the real motive as soon as possible. This time he may actually be able to prevent everything. If he was capable of delaying the whole thing until Iruma-chan finished her work… He didn’t even let them finish comment on the new motive, he just jumped to his feet and grabbed the thing from the bear’s paw. They obviously started to accuse him of wanting to use the card for himself. Kokichi was about to throw some joke when he realized that he would have a better chance of delaying the kidnappers’ actions by acting like he was going for the next kill.

“I would not mind if another murder was to happen so soon, you know?” he said putting some distance between himself and the others. “This is a game, why would the players not want to play?”

Momota-chan started to shout at him and Kokichi sprinted out of the dining room at full speed. He was really fast on his feet and reached the entrance way before Momota-chan. He opened the secret passage to his Lab and hid inside as quickly as possible. He needed some time to reflect on his next move. It had been a while since he last entered his Lab. He noticed that new monitors were now switched on, he had a view of each floor. He realized, with relief, that he could follow Saihara-chan’s exploration without leaving the Lab.

He sat on his chair putting his feet on the control panel for the monitors and started to play with the card key. First, he needed to figure out where that thing was going to be used. The first place that came to mind was the hidden door in the library but he was pretty sure that it was not for that. He would try, because he would feel extremely stupid if afterward he would find out that it was just that, but he didn’t have any hope.
The card could go in a new place that he had yet to see, or it could go in the underground tunnel. He had seen something like that in that place. He had to try, later. In the meantime, he needed to prepare a reserve plan. His little act, earlier, made him realize something. The kidnappers were after some sick entertainment if he could provide them with just that… Maybe if he could play the role of the bad guy and make them believe that he was going to commit a murder any moment they would stop pushing them forward. Could he? Could he play the bad guy? Could he gain some precious time?

No, it was not a question, he had to do it. He had to.

There was no other way around, he had to provide them the entertainment they wanted.

He was going to need all his acting skill to pull off this one.
Past Side

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Descent into madness

Before addressing the huge problem that the poison was presenting he decided to finish the investigation of the room. Maybe he was going to find something that would make his crazy theory impossible.

Fuyuhiko had picked up a colorful book from Nagito’s bed table. On closer inspection, Kokichi could see that it was called ‘Monomi’s diary’. He remembered the rabbit mention that it had been stolen, so it was Nagito who did it. Not really surprising. Fuyuhiko noticed his interest and held it close to him to read it together. Inside were listed a lot of useless entries written in a childish language. Kokichi was about to dismiss it as completely useless when he read the most recent entry. It was about him, Kokichi, going to the bathroom the night before Gundham’s crime.

Something didn’t make sense about it. It was not written from the point of view of Monomi but from the point of view of-

“Hay, what’s this?!” Kazuichi yelled from his kneeling position in front of the bed.

He picked up a mask, a pair of gloves and a piece of aluminum. Kokichi understood that this was the definitive proof that his crazy theory was correct. Next was Sonia’s turn to catch his attention.

“There is a strange book here!” she brought it to him.

It was a black, rigid folder with profiles in it. Kokichi sat on the bed and started to read it carefully. His blood, already cold, became even colder. There was a profile for all of them, the dead included, but they weren’t… it was nothing like what he knew or remembered. But the photos were clearly theirs, even if they looked a little different. It took him a long time before he could finally concretize his whole theory and close the folder. Half the time was spent trying to convince himself that he was not crazy.

“Let’s exit from here, I’m suffocating.” he said, they looked at each other for a moment and then followed him outside. “Monokuma!” he called loudly. “I know that you can hear me, it’s over, really over. I know everything now, it’s time to end this!”

Instead of appearing, as usual, the bear’s laugh resonated through the sky and reality stopped existing bit by bit.

Like in a pixel game the texture of the scenery warped and then reconstructed. They were now in a big circular room with a red wall. It was empty except for a high chair on the center. The bear was sitting on it.

“I see, I see…” he was covering his mouth with his paws. “Nagito’s prize has become of public domain and we figured it was time to end this season anyway. Care to explain everything to your dear friends?”

So he did. He took a deep breath and faced the others, all except for one were panicking at the
sudden change of scenario.

“Everyone, will you listen to me?” he tried to sound as reassuring as possible. “What I’m about to tell you will sound crazy but at this point, I think that there is no denying it…”

They looked at each other once again before nodding and saying that they trusted him.

“Okay, let’s start with something simpler, Nagito’s case. I told you that it was a suicide, and I was half right. It was his will to die, but he set up someone else. Remember all the things that he did that I have explained to you? Camouflage. Truthfully, Nagito put the poison inside one of the fire grenades that we used and he died that way. By poisoning. And it was one of us who threw the poison at him. We have proof of that, the gloves, the mask, and the poison itself. He used all of this to temper with a fire grenade, the aluminum comes from the lid of it.”

“Wait, wait, wait, stop!” Kazuichi interrupted him. “What do you mean that one of us threw the poison at him?! Are you trying to say that one of us is the culprit and that person doesn’t even know they did it?!”

“Yes, that’s right.” he confirmed. “Nagito put the poison in a random fire grenade. He wanted one of us to throw it and kill him, that’s the whole reason why he planned the fire too. Why else? Once he let go of the spear he was dead, he didn’t need the fire for anything.”

“But,” Rantaro was really pale, “how do we know who throw it? If it was random…”

“Oh, it was not really random. It’s Nagito we are talking about, he was a crafty bastard.” he said casually. “Nothing he does is random. He had a target in mind and he relied on his Ultimate Bullshit to pick the right person. Nagito wanted to uncover the mastermind of this show, and he could only rely on his luck to do so. That’s the whole reason why he prepared this plan. To make sure that either way the show would end.”

“Now wait just a moment! Are you saying that we are supposed to trust Nagito’s luck? That he used something so stupid to weed out the traitor?” Fuyuhiko was disbelieving. “And what do you mean show? End the show?”

“Not a traitor, a mastermind. And yes, that’s exactly it.” he answered. “Because this is a show not placed inside the real world we can believe in his Bullshit as much as we want. I’m sure that the program has already calculated that variable to make the show realistic.”

“Man, you are not making any goddamn sense…” Kazuichi was ruffling his own hair.

“Right, let’s take a step at a time,” he continued explaining, “the first thing that we have to do is figure out the mastermind. Just trust me on the fact that Nagito’s killer is really that person. I already know who that person is, but I want to give them a possibility to came forward on their own, after all, is just like the bear said, it’s time to close this season.”

“Yes, I don’t mind stepping forward,” said Chiaki with a small smile, “the production already gave me permission to wrap this up.”

“What, Chiaki?!” Sonia yelled. “This joke is not funny!”

“Guys, you need to calm down, everything is fine, you can believe Leader and me.” she answered calmly. “I know that you all must be scared and I apologize for that… But there was really no other way. I tried my best to keep you as happy as possible considering the nature of the show. Luckily, they decided to wrap this up sooner than expected because Nagito’s health situation was getting dangerous, we gave him the file to create a worthy ending.”
Kokichi felt sorry for them as they were clearly losing their mind because of too many information. He felt the same just a little while ago, now he was just… accepting. There was nothing else he could really do, not when it was all his own fault.

“Going with order,” he intervened, “Chi-chan is the mastermind, or maybe I should call her the intern manager for this show. Nagito wanted her to admit defeat because that would end all of this, and he gave his life knowing that he would not really die. Well, there was the possibility that we could not discover her real identity, but in that case, we would have just been executed for failing to find the culprit and that would have ended this too. Basically, he created a scenario that would forcefully end the show no matter what.”

“But what do you mean show?! And what do you mean he did not really die?!” Fuyuhiko was losing completely his patience.

“This is the painful part… So please stay calm and listen to me.” he tried to sound firm. “I know that this will sound crazy but we are inside a show that’s being conducted inside virtual reality. Nothing of what happened until now it’s real. It was all… fiction… The murders, the islands… We actually already saw a lot of things that did not make any sense, right? Like the executions and Monokuma and Monomi appearing and disappearing as they please… It’s because it’s not real, it just a computer program. From outside they control everything that happens inside here and then they broadcast it to the world. It's all explained here.” he raised the folder that was still in his hand.

“That’s total bullshit!” Kazuichi yelled on top of his lungs. “Virtual Reality so advanced doesn’t even exist yet!”

“It does, it had just been removed from your memories.” contradicted him Chiaki.

“So, are you saying,” tried Rantaro, “that we were made enter some strange show inside Virtual Reality? A show where we are supposed to kill each other and investigate?”

“That’s… no entirely correct.” Kokichi sighed. “We… entered on our own accord, we participated in a casting and got selected.”

“No way! I would remember if I were to take part in something so shady!” protested Sonia.

“No, you would not remember.” said Chiaki. “One of the biggest reason people decide to take part of this show, except for becoming a celebrity, is to change themselves. Most of the people that try the casting does it because they dream to be someone different. They come to us, share their desires and we decide if we can let them play the role. Your old memories had been replaced with these new ones, I’m sorry, the change is permanent. After the end of the show, you are free to talk to the company if the memories you have now are not of your liking.”

“You must be frigging kidding me…” Kazuichi had big round eyes.

“I know that it must be hard to believe…” she placed her hands on her chest. “Your Ultimate talents are not the real deal either. Unfortunately, we could only stuff useful information inside your brain, you’ll have to work hard yourself if you really want to become that person… But I believe in all of you.” her smile was sweet. “I know that it may sound fake after all the bad things that have happened… But I legitimately wanted to make you all happy, to grant your wishes. This year theme was friendship and cooperation. That’s why we have chosen so many people with leadership skills.” she pointed at the folder that was still in Kokichi’s hands. “You can see digital copies of all your interviews inside that folder.”

Kokichi passed it to Rantaro and all of them checked the inside one by one. They all had an
incredible expression on their faces as they were looking at the pictures and text files.

“I made you all suffer,” she said after some time, “but I’m still very glad I managed this season. All of you have finally fulfilled your dreams and that’s what I wanted. Byakuya’s dream was to be taken seriously despite his physical apparence. Teruteru really wanted to become an amazing cook. Mahiru’s dream was to become confident in her photography skill. Peko wanted to find someone to love with all her heart and be able to protect them. Ibuki’s dream was to perform at least once in her life in front of people without feeling shy. Hiyoko wanted to have a strong personality and not let anyone boss her around anymore. Mikan wanted to be seen as a cute and lovable girl that was dependable in times of need, something went a little wrong with her memories though… Nekomaru wanted the strength and courage to protect the people he loved no matter what. Gundham wanted to become someone capable of living by his own morals and loved by animals. Nagito was… looking for someone.”

She turned to face Fuyuhiko.

“You, Fuyuhiko, wanted to be confident in yourself and loved by someone.” then she turned to Sonia. “You, Sonia, wanted to become a real refined and cultured lady.” next was Rantaro. “You, Rantaro, wanted to be able to take care of weaker people, to be a support for them.” Kazuichi squirmed a little under her gaze. “You, Kazuichi, wanted to be finally upfront about your desires, if I remember correctly you said: ‘I want to score a hot girlfriend!’” he hid his face in his hat. Last, she smiled at him. “You, Kokichi, wanted to be able to show your true feelings and trust others.”

She took a step back looking at them all.

“You succeeded in making your dream a reality! I’m happy to have had this experience with you all, now you can return to the real world with your new lives and—“ something biped in her pocket and she took out her handbook. She frowned deeply. “What? No, wait my role is not finished yet you can’t—“

She never got to finish her sentence, she started to glow brightly and then she disintegrated into a million of cubic fragments. They ran to the point where she was standing.

“What happened?!” yelled Sonia, scared.

“Now, now, now!” Monokuma was snickering from his seat. “Miss little mastermind thought she could just bend the rules and close the season as she liked! Haven’t you all forgotten something crucial? Take a look at the regulations!”

They took out the handbooks and opened the rules menu. Kokichi’s eyes scanned the wall of text until they found something.

“-The experiment will automatically come to an end when only three test subjects remain alive-“ he read out loud. “Don’t tell me…”

“Yep, that’s exactly right!” the bear yelled. “Only three people are allowed to win a season of Danganronpa! No exception!”

“But it doesn’t really matter, does it?” he tried to argue. “I mean, even if we lose we still wake up in the real world, right?”

“Puhuhu.” the bear was covering a smile with his paws. “The three winners can wake up immediately, sure, but we have a little tradition going on, you know? Why do you think Byakuya had the title of Ultimate Survivor? Because he had already participated in the last season of
Danganronpa! Well, not only him actually, but the important part is… we need an Ultimate Survivor for the next season! Since we have two extras here… well, just choose which one of you want to participate next year! I’m waiting!”

Silence fell on the room. Kokichi understood, three of them could go back to the real world and reunite with the others, two had to stay back and play another role, in another season. He smiled, he was remembering the conversation that he had with Gundham, how he thought, at that time, that he wanted to sacrifice himself for his friends, how he considered his friends worthy of dying for. Then he remembered that time in the restaurant, when they all called him Leader for the first time, the happiness and feeling of fulfillment. At that time he had been sure that other people had already called him that before, now he knew better. There were absolutely no other people he would offer all of himself for, in the whole world. The choice was simple, really.

“I’m staying behind.” he declared firmly.

Sonia, Kazuichi and Fuyuhiko looked at him with open mouths.

“Yeah, I’m staying behind too.” was Rantaro reaction, he was smiling calmly.

“What are you two saying?! You can’t accept something like that?! Why… why it has to be you two?” Fuyuhiko protested loudly and Sonia agreed, Kazuichi was looking everywhere besides their direction.

“Because,” Kokichi answered with conviction, “I’ve already obtained all I wanted to obtain in a lifetime in these days with you all. I don’t have any regret and I feel complete. Besides, who else?” he looked Fuyuhiko straight in the eyes. “You need to leave this place, Peko is waiting for you, remember?” he observed him blush and advert his gaze before looking at Sonia. “And the same goes for you, don’t make Gundham wait.” she started to cry silently with her hands pressed to her chest.

“Kazuichi, let’s be honest, you don’t want to stay here, and you want to follow Miss Sonia anyway. I’ll pretend to have received your offer, so, thank you!” Kazuichi scratched his head embarrassed.

“But what about you, Rantaro?” Fuyuhiko asked.

“I’m a Big Brother! I want you all to go back to your loved one and obviously,” he stared at Kokichi with a mischievous expression, “I have to take care of my baby brother over there. He would be lost without me!”

“Eeeeh?!” Kokichi faked an outraged pout. “What do you mean baby brother?! I’m way more mature than you, can’t you see it just by looking at my awesome sexy body?!”

Rantaro grabbed his head and ruffled his hair vigorously.

“Sure, of course! Go back to sip your milk, you little kid!” he looked at the others. “Just go and leave this brat to me, I’m good at taking care of gremlins like this one!”

“Buuu, Love-me-chan!” he faked some tears too. “You are so mean to me! I’m such a cute and delicate flower!!”

Rantaro nodded solemnly, the others chuckled awkwardly.

“I see, I see!” the bear intruded in the good atmosphere. “Good choice, you two are fans’ favorites after all. I’m sure they will be absolutely ecstatic to see you two play again! Well then!”

Kokichi had barely the time to think that he wanted to give them a hug before saying goodbyes that
the three of them started to glow like Chiaki and in a moment all that remained were fragments.

Rantaro ruffled his hair a little more, gently this time.

“This sure was a crazy journey, wasn’t it?”

Chapter End Notes

You may feel like the ending was a bit lackluster, but I wanted to create a parallel with Tsumugi and show how this could have been handled by a good person like Chiaki, who cared about their happiness, instead of that crazy fangirl who spat on everyone's feelings <.<

(Yes, I hate her, no redemption hahah)
Kokichi spied on Saihara-chan’s exploration the whole morning.

The first place the Detective visited was the fourth floor where he used the brush on the hanging scroll. Kokichi had bet that the scroll was a 'junk place' and he won, too bad there was no prize waiting for him. When the scroll revealed another set of stairs two of the turned off monitors switched on. One showed the top of the stairs, something that looked like a hall with two ugly Monokuma themed statues and a door. The door was decorated with clothing accessories, he didn’t need to check inside to know who’s Lab it was. The second monitor showed another hall, it was full of little pillars and there were two doors. One looked like it was made of stone, there was no sign that would indicate what was inside. The other one was black striped and there was a magnifying glass on. Saihara-chan’s Lab.

He would investigate all of these rooms later during the night. Kokichi observed Saihara-chan enter inside Shirogane-chan’s Lab with her and spent some time there, then he did the same with his own Lab together with Harukawa-chan. He could not see what was happening inside, but he saw Momota-chan joining them, he had finally given up on finding him. In another monitor Iruma-chan caught his attention, she was going outside, probably to her Lab. He was unsure of what to do, he wanted to follow Saihara-chan but he really, really, needed to talk with her.

With a sigh he got up, he was going to explore the whole building once again anyway, his time was better spent obtaining the key to freedom. His timing was pretty bad, Saihara-chan, with his friends following him, was descending the stairs when Kokichi emerged from the secret passage. Scared to be caught on the act he leaped out the entrance door like a deer escaping from the hunt dogs. Outside he noticed with disappointment that all the greenery had disappeared and that he had nowhere to hide. Later he would realize that there was absolutely no need for him to hide, he didn’t have his secret hiding spot written on his forehead after all. He ended up hiding behind the shrine of judgment.

Iruma-chan was right outside her Lab with Kiibo. Kokichi was about to come out of hiding and talk to her, he was sure that Saihara-chan was investigating inside, when the Detective appeared in his eyes sight. For a moment their eyes met and Saihara-chan’s eyebrow lifted. Kokichi hid again, he felt his embarrassment growing and his pale cheeks were becoming pink.

‘Since when I’m so bad at hid and seek?’

Luckily, the Detective chose to talk to Iruma-chan instead of seeking him out. It would have been just too shameful having to escape from him because he was embarrassed. He was still lost in his thoughts when something fell from the sky. Kokichi stared with round eyes at the huge building, shaped like a missile, that had literally materialized from nowhere and fallen from the sky like it was nothing. Was he really going crazy? Why Saihara-chan and the other two had not reacted like normal human beings and freaked the hell out? Was he the only one that thought of that as impossible?

The missile was actually Kiibo’s Lab. He waited for them to get out of it so he could finally talk with Iruma-chan but when they did Saihara-chan started to make his way toward him. Kokichi collected himself, his pride was forbidding him from actually ran away, he stood straight with a smile on his face. When he was close enough Saihara-chan opened his mouth to speak but Kokichi interrupted
“Oh, my beloved Saihara-chan! Fancy meeting here, right?” Kokichi wanted to smack his own face.

*That’s not what I was supposed to say, that’s stupid and suspicious!!*

Saihara-chan stayed with his mouth open a little longer than necessary, then he recovered.

“If you wanted to see Kiibo’s Lab you could have just come with us, you know?” he shook his head a little. “Anyway, I wanted to talk to you. Are you okay?”

“What?” Kokichi blinked, caught by surprise.

“I mean…” he scratched his head a little. “You hit your head, didn’t you? Earlier I didn’t pay any attention to it because honestly, you caught me so off guard that I completely forgot the most sensible things to do… And you shouldn’t have joked about it…” he shook his head again with a sigh. “But I’m sorry, were you okay? You’re kinda… acting strange today.”

Kokichi killed the faint feeling of happiness at the boy’s concern for his health like a mosquito. He needed to change the subject, immediately.

“Saihara-chan! Since you are so worried about me you will die for me so that I can go to the hospital, right?!” he yelled obnoxiously like a little kid.

Saihara-chan’s worried expression turned into one of disbelief, he sighed deeply, his shoulders falling a bit.

“Why I can never have a serious conversation with you?” he shook his head once again. “I was really worried you know, there is no need to joke, I was not lying, you can trust me.”

Kokichi’s inside clenched painfully, receiving a bull’s eye was never easy. He could say that as much as he wanted, Kokichi was never going to be fooled. Sure, Saihara-chan maybe was really worried, no he probably was, but that meant nothing. People worried about others out of self-serving reason, like the feeling of gratification that came when they thought they were good people. In the end, all of them would abandon him. No one wanted to put up with him for long. No one wanted to accept his cruel, selfish nature. Kokichi never lied to himself about the kind of person he was, he accepted all his flaws, embraced them even. That was why he’d rather send everyone away before he could get attached. Before they could break him.

“Let’s have a serious battle then! This time we will fight to decide which of us will survive! This world is not big enough for both of us!” he continued to spin his nonsense. “It’s a battle of life and death sooo, we gotta play rock-paper-scissors!”

Saihara-chan whispered something about the fact that rock-paper-scissors had nothing to do with a battle of life and death but agreed anyway. Kokichi had chosen that specific game for a reason, it was a psychological game. He studied it very deeply some years ago, he wanted a game that he was completely sure to win. Or lose, depending on the situation. This was one of those rare times when he was actually going for a tie. They played and played and played, Kokichi purposely tied every single time. He was really having a lot of fun once again. Messing with Saihara-chan was the funniest thing he had done in a long while, maybe ever. His expression was becoming more and more shocked by the second, Kokichi kept a straight face for a bit then started to mimic him and make ridiculous expressions of surprise. Truthfully he wanted to do nothing else than laugh until his stomach hurt.

“Saihara-chan?! Stop this! It’s the bijillion times we have played!! I’m getting bored!! Just finish it
already!!” he yelled on top of his lungs.

“It’s not my fault!! I’m not doing it on purpose!!” Saihara-chan was panicking for real, Kokichi wanted to kiss him because he was just too adorable and cute.

‘Wait what?’

The fun had drowned his brain, for sure. Yeah, sure, Saihara-chan was definitely his type, he was an intelligent, pretty and adorable boy but that didn’t mean—

‘Okay, shut up Kokichi.’

He took a step back to sober up his brain drunk with mirth. He remembered his role, he was supposed to remain lucid in every situation.

“Do you know Saihara-chan, there is a way to get infinite ties on this game…” he put his finger on his lips.

“Did you…?” Saihara-chan was staring into his eyes.

“No way!” he yelled. “This was all thanks to your luck! Looks like you will live a little longer! Bye, Saihara-chan!”

He escaped, yes he truly ran away, from his gaze. He went inside the library to try the card key, obviously, it didn’t work. Later he was inside the dining room, they had found another flashback light. Kokichi’s brain was hurting again, for some reason he really hated that thing. They questioned him a little about the card but he easily dodged the bullet by telling them that he had not found the right place to use it, it was a bit a lie and a bit not. The images this time were so stupidly fake that he was tempted to laugh aloud. Meteorites.

‘Yeah, looks totally legit.’

Once again he was disappointed when he saw that everyone was actually believing it without a second thought.

“Yeah, who knows!” he mocked them. “Maybe a lethal virus was spread by these meteorites, maybe the aliens attacked us, or maybe an unknown matter that can bend space and time was discovered inside of them!”

“Stop joking you idiot!” shouted Momota-chan.

“You guy believe in technologies like Monokuma and the flashback lights so why not believe this too! Looks perfectly fine to me!” he shrugged.

He didn’t notice that Iruma-chan had been affected by the flashback light way more than the others. After dinner, he went inside Iruma-chan’s Lab.

“Keh, what are you doing here, you little reject?” was her greetings.

“Are the Electrohammers ready yet?” he didn’t want to waste any time.

“What are you going to use them for?” she answered his question with another question.

“To disarm the Exisals, what else?” he really didn’t want to waste any time.

“What?! You didn’t tell me that you were going to use them like this!” she was panicking for some
reason. “I refuse to give them to you! Monokuma will know that I was the one that created them and he will punish me! I want to live! The world needs me! My inventions will make the world a better place!”

Kokichi was speechless. He thought that she would be happy that her inventions were going to save them all. His tone became really serious.

“Are you being serious right now?” he asked.

“Yes, I am.” she was. “You even took the motive, I don’t trust you! You are going to get us all killed! For you, this is all fun and shit. Stay away from me, don’t come near me ever again.”

He was forced outside of her Lab and he was furious. That stupid girl was going to get all of them killed because she wanted to save only herself. She could try to cover it as much as she wanted but that was the truth, she just wanted to save herself and fuck the others. Without the Electrohammers he was forced to retort to his plan B. And his brain was still hurting a lot, the headache was not letting him rest at all.

Not wanting to challenge the underground passage in that precarious state he decided to explore the building instead. The night passed quickly as he investigated Shirogane-chan’s Lab, tried without success to force open the strange stone door and at least investigated Saihara-chan’s Lab. His headache was preventing him from focus, he saw all the poisons but he could not memorize any of them, he saw the strange files but all the letters were dancing in front of his eyes, not making any sense. He gave up and went to sleep.

The next morning he woke up far too early, the pain had not subdued at all. Not feeling well rested he dragged himself to the dining hall, he decided to eat and take some medicine from the warehouse because this was not acceptable. He didn’t say anything at all to the others, he barely listened as people were saying that Iruma-chan was not getting out of the computer room for any reason. After eating he dragged himself to the warehouse and started to search through the drugs for something that would stop the pain. A hand took a bottle out of his grasp.

“Ouma-kun? What are you searching for?” Saihara-chan was wearing a really worried expression.

“You didn’t even stop when I called you and you didn’t notice that I was following you. Do you have a concussion? Are you feeling sick?”

His mind was sluggish and he just followed his instinct to lie, to conceal. He spouted the first idea that came to mind and it turned out that it was not a good idea at all.

“Nope! I was searching for a painkiller because the next game we are going to play will be painful!” he tried to sound as cheerful as ever.

Saihara-chan was not fooled, his expression filled with irritation but he did not give up.

“Ouma-kun, if you need a painkiller just say so, I can help you-“

“No, no! You don’t get it! Here, I’m starting the game, you’ll go next okay?” he took a little knife from one of the shelves of the warehouse, placed his hand on a box and started to stab repeatedly the empty spaces between each of his fingers. He seriously had no idea why he thought that this game would be a good thing to do in his condition. Saihara-chan was observing him with alarm on his face but he was not saying anything because he was afraid to make him lose focus. As it was predictable he ended up cutting himself. “Ow!”

“Ouma-kun?!” Saihara-chan yelled panicking as he grabbed his hand.
“It’s nothing, it’s just a little—“ he tried to take his hand back.

“Now shut up and stay put!” his forceful tone made Kokichi silent immediately, the Detective had never reacted this strongly before. “Here, bandages… Ah, before that I need to clean the cut! Hmm… disinfectant…”

Saihara-chan wasted a lot of effort in taking care of his finger. After he cleaned it he forced him to drink a painkiller, Kokichi and Saihara-chan both knew that it was not for the finger. The pain in his head started to diminish a little as Saihara-chan started to wrap the bandage around the clean cut. Free to think again but mostly dunk on pain and fatigue, Kokichi admired him work feeling light and sated. When was the last time someone took such good care of him? For some reason, he started to feel a little special and he could not contain his signature laugh.

“You think that this will work?” Saihara-chan asked in the end, with a sigh.

“Yep! It’s perfect!” he smiled broadly. “Thank you, my beloved Saihara-chan! You were so worried about me! Now I’ve stolen your heart, I don’t need to steal your life anymore. You’ll never, ever, be able to forget me!”

Saihara-chan stared at him, his cheeks were a little more pink than usual. Then he closed his eyes.

“Stop messing with me…” he breathed.

“No way! Messing with you is the funniest thing ever!” Kokichi chuckled.

“So you admit that you were messing with me!” he sounded incredulous.

Kokichi jumped to his feet and ran for the door, it was a tradition at this point, all the meetings with Saihara-chan had ended with him running away.

“Well, that was a lie, ‘cause I’m a liar! You are actually boring, bye!” he stuck his tongue at him.

He ran without knowing where he was going, too in high spirit to really care. He stumbled on the fourth floor without even realizing. His head was letting him think a bit more and he remembered the discussion in the dining room. He peeked into the computer room, it was empty. Kokichi had no idea if he was lucky or they were just exaggerating.

A window was open on the screen, he got closer and started to read. It was a complex program, it would take him some time to completely understand what he was looking at. But he never got the opportunity. As soon as he saw the title of the window a stab of pain more intense than anything before made his ears ring and his eyes sting with tears.

*Neo World Program.*

Kokichi ran away from it as fast as he could. He reached his dorm room and frantically shut the door behind him with a bang. He didn’t make it to the bed, he collapsed on the floor as he lost consciousness.

He was dreaming,

or maybe he was remembering.

He saw Rantaro’s face.

*I’ll see you again somewhere, someday-*
They were trapped inside a room.

After Sonia, Kazuichi and Fuyuhiko disappeared the bear explained the situation that was going to unfold from there. Basically, Danganronpa season 52 had just ended and the broadcast to the outside world had been cut. The bear said that the real finale was going to be live, with interviews featuring the winners and a big party at the end, with the monetary prize distribution.

Par the rules, they could not leave the Virtual World. Apparently, there were precedents of people trying to escape their ‘responsibility’ as survivors and run away from the staff. Furthermore, the bear told them that the Neo World Program, the name of the Virtual World they were trapped in, was far from perfect. It seemed that connecting a brain two times in a short timeframe could lead to damage. He assured them that their real bodies were being taken good care of.

Kokichi didn’t exactly like the sound of that but he guessed that he had only himself to blame. He chose this in the first place. In the end, since the season was over and they didn’t want to waste too much money on sustaining the settings, the whole ‘world’ collapsed and they were teleported and trapped inside a room. The room only had two beds in it. An incorporeal voice informed them that the simulation of their body functions had been stopped. In other words, they didn’t have hunger or sleepiness or to expel waste anymore. The voice told them that they had to just wait patiently for the start of the next season, the 53rd.

The first week passed with them sleeping and lazing around all time. They didn’t have a window or a clock, nor hunger or need for sleep. It was impossible for them to understand if it was day or night, Monday or Saturday. For them a month could have been a year or a day.

They talked, of course, but in absence of anything interesting to look at they had only the past to talk about. Rantaro gave him an extensive report about his family, he described all his little sisters and his parents and relatives. He told him that both his father and his mother remarried a couple of times so he had a lot of stepmothers and stepfathers. All his sisters were not related to him by blood in their entirety but he said that he was glad for that. He explained that he was much happier for them to be all on the same level, he didn’t want them to feel less special than any of the others. He had spent time with all of them equally and loved them all the same way.

Obviously, Rantaro recognized with disappointment the fact that all of it was only in his head. This was only his character setting. None of his sisters existed in the first place. Probably. There was no ready to face reality just yet.

Kokichi talked about his life in the orphanage. He told him about his father, who murdered his mother with a kitchen knife when he was five. He told him that he was sent to an orphanage with a child therapist present every day. He explained how he spent five years without talking, only drawing in the therapist’s office in silence while the man was reading aloud complicated psychology manuals. He described him the day he decided to talk again, the way the Professor reacted. Kokichi didn’t consider the Professor like a father figure, more like a teacher, a mentor. He spent all his
middle school years discussing the human mind with him. He described how he used his knowledge to conquer, from the shadow, the Student Council. The Ultimate initiative wanted to scout him as the Ultimate Student Council President, but Kokichi told them that he was going to conquer the world someday. All or nothing.

Naturally, Kokichi knew that it was all in his head. He was disappointed when he reached the conclusion that he was never going to see the Professor again. That he never existed. He wasn’t sure about how he should feel at the thought that probably his parents weren’t dead. Maybe. There was no way to know. He didn’t want to know, true to be told.

They could talk about the future. By the time the first month rolled around they were daydreaming about the next season.

“We are going to lose all the memories that we have, don’t we?” asked one day Rantaro, he was hugging his knees, seated on his bed.

“They are not going to let us participate with the memory of this being a show, that’s for sure.” he answered with certainty.

“Does this means… That I’m going to forget all about our friends? Sonia, Fuyuhiko, Kazuichi and all the others? I’ll lose all my memories of them?” he sounded extremely sad.

“…Probably.” sometimes Kokichi hated himself, his cynicism.

Talking about the future was never easy.

They could play games. The played truth or dare, and other little games that didn’t require any object to work. They couldn’t even play trumps without the frigging trumps. Some days Kokichi would be so bored out of his mind that he would start to behave like a little kid. He would throw tantrums and yell and jump on the beds making Rantaro fall on the floor. Rantaro would only look at him with condescendence. His patience was truly something else.

Some days Kokichi would scream with all his might against the staff of Danganronpa. His words every time a little more vulgar.

“You stupid shits! Give us something to do, freaking bastards! Don’t you know that a healthy adolescent needs three things? Fried food, sex and videogames! You won’t give us even one of the three!” he turned to look at Rantaro and pointed at him. “You! Love-me-chan, have sex with me!”

“No, I’m sorry, I’ll have to decline.” he answered nonchalantly, used to his antics by that point.

“What?! But I’m bored to death Love-me-chan! The least that you can do is offer your body as my playtime!” he shouted throwing his arms high.

“Even so, I’m sorry, I really don’t swing that way.” he was smiling, amused.

“Well, then change side!” he let himself fall on the bed. “Buuu, Love-me-chan, buuu! You’re boring! Boring, boring, boring, boring, boring, super duper boring!” he rolled on the sheets until he fell over. “Ow.” Rantaro laughed.

There were times when they sat on the floor and looked at the ceiling.

“Do you think that they will at least let us keep our backstories?” Rantaro asked him. “That we will still be the Ultimate Supreme Leader and Big Brother?”
“I’m not so sure about that.” he answered with his usual cynicism. “One of us will be the Ultimate Survivor, maybe they will give us new backstories too.”

Rantaro didn’t ask anything else. The possibilities were just too frightening.

There were times when they talked from under the sheets, when they could not fall asleep. It was like they were having a pajama party.

“So, you once said that you like cute or handsome guys…” Rantaro said with mischief on his face. “Which of us have you liked the most?”

“What kind of question is that?! Of course that’s you Love-me-chan!” he said indignantly. “And after I’ve confessed my love for you so many times!”

“Yeah, sure. I mean for real.” he was not fooled into changing subjects.

“Tsk! Well, if you really need to know…” Kokichi put his hands behind his head. “There was a moment when I actually thought that I was falling in love with Gundham. He was just so special, you know? He is too good for the world, real or fake.”

“I see.” he smiled fondly. “I’m sorry that your love is not reciprocated.”

“Don’t exaggerate now, I said that I thought I was. I never set my sight on people that already belong to someone else! I’m not a boyfriends thief!” he pouted. “Well, what about you?”

“Hmm…” Rantaro considered the question for a moment. “I don’t know, I’ve never fallen in love before, you know? I’ve never even looked at someone that way… Am I strange?”

“Nah, not really. You are just waiting for the right person.” he shrugged.

There was a day when the voice came back.

“Amami Rantaro, Ouma Kokichi, the new setting for the 53rd season of Danganronpa has been decided. As Survivors, you two have the privilege of entering it before anyone else.”

The room dissolved into tiny little fragments. They found themselves in a garden of some sort, above their heads they could see a cage. In the distance was a huge, tall building too. Suddenly, making them jump in fright, a guy appeared out of thin air. He was short and skinny, with bags under his eyes and he was wearing a suit.

“Good day, I’m one of the Admins of the Neo World Program.” he introduced himself while looking at a paper in his hand. “We have created a poll for the fans to vote, just like last year. It’s a tradition to let the viewers decide which will hold the Survivor title and which will keep his old title. This year Ouma Kokichi’s Supreme Leader talent was by far the favorite, so the fans voted for him to keep it. Amami Rantaro, you will participate in your second season as the Ultimate Survivor. Please, follow me, you can create a Survivor Perk to use later in the game, it’s your reward.”

“Wait, wait, I’m here for the second time too!” Kokichi protested. “How come that I’m not allowed a cool prize?!”

“I’m sorry it’s not up to me to decide…” he bowed a little without looking at him in the eyes. “You are free to explore the Ultimate Academy if you want.”

The Admin and Rantaro entered the building, Kokichi explored the new setting as extensively as he could, who knows maybe he would remember something and this would be useful somehow. It was
a school, what a boring choice.

When Rantaro returned, Kokichi was waiting for him seated on a bench, he was alone.

“So?” he asked him.

“He made me record a video and write a message…” he looked sad. “Kokichi, they are going to erase our memory completely.”

“We already knew that.” he shrugged.

“No, I mean, I’m going to forget all about you too…” he looked at him with eyes filled with sadness and resignation.

Kokichi sighed, got up and lightly punched him in the stomach.

“Don’t be stupid, no way I’m going to forget about you! And you better not forget about me either!” he smiled. “Rantaro, no matter what we become, no matter where we are, we’ll find a way. A Leader doesn’t give up so easily! We are going to end this season as soon as possible and go back to our friends. No, we are going to end this show, Danganronpa, once and for all!” he nodded to himself. “This whole memory thing may be good if you want to become someone different, maybe. But I can’t forgive the fact that we are being pulled around like toys, they are making us suffer to entertain people! Killing isn’t necessary for making a person happy and fulfilled. Even if Teruteru and Peko and the others got what they wanted, even in the real world they are not going to forget the things that they have done. It may have been fake, but for them it was real. The choice to kill someone was real. It’s our responsibility Rantaro, as we have chosen to come here. We have to end this.”

Rantaro looked at him surprised for a moment then he smiled with determination.

“You are right, Leader. I know that I’ll see you again, somewhere, someday. No matter what.”

Chapter End Notes

Congratulation, you have just reached the half-way point!

IMPORTANT:
Starting from next chapter I'll post only ONE chapter every other day.
The reason for this is that I need more time and space to work, I've not accumulated any spare chapter during the last month and it's been two months since I've started writing a chapter a day, no exception. I'm writing another story too, in another fandom, and contrary to this one, that one I have still many ideas that need to be clarified. This one is already complete in my head, it's only a matter of putting it into words.
Another reason is the fact that until now the chapters had been mostly followed the canon, from here on it won't be like this anymore. You may think that it's strange but the true plot of this story starts now! All you have read was preparation for this part!
Furthermore, the next chapters don't need to be read one after the other, you'll see what I mean soon enough.

By the way, can you do something cool for me? Go back to the first chapter and search, I've put a little foreshadowing in there! Let's see if you can find it :) (It was there from
the start, of course, if you don't remember it you probably just dismiss it as nonsense :P )
His mind had exploded.

Images, voices, memories were flooding back, all at once. They were not in order, they were just hitting his skull restlessly. The pain made him come back to his senses, he grabbed his head and pressed it against the floor in a desperate attempt to make the pain stop. The memories stop.


Chiaki.

Show.

Nagito.

Suicide.

'Rantaro!' The flow stopped and Kokichi’s mind was filled with the most prominent memory, the one of the person he had spent most time with.

'Rantaro! You died just like that! I let you die! I promised as your Leader that I would have been there for you but I forgot! I forgot about you all! All this time, I thought I was alone in the world… My friends… Why did I forget my friends?! All the time I wasted feeling lost… All the time I wasted playing by the rules… This is all meaningless. All completely meaningless. All my memories are fake, not only the ones I had until now but the ones I had before too. I don’t even know who I am, WHO AM I?

What kind of person is the one that signed the contract with Danganronpa that day? What kind of person was Rantaro? Who is Rantaro?! Who are my friends? Who is Saihara-chan? Momota-chan, Harukawa-chan, Akamatsu-chan, everyone, who are they?! I don’t even know who I am, I can’t even trust myself anymore, how am I supposed to trust anyone or anything anymore?! Is this even the whole truth, did I really remember everything? What if I’m wrong? What if I have just gone crazy? What if this is an illusion? What if this is just them messing with me again? What if this is just a fake memory that they wanted me to have? WHAT AM I SUPPOSED TO BELIEVE?!

Kokichi hit his head on the floor repeatedly trying to stop everything from going out of his control. His body was shaking, overwhelmed by waves of panic. It was too much to take in one go.
Everything was just too big and powerful, too unbelievable and sci-fi, too emotional and soul-crushing. How does one react when everything that’s inside his mind is a lie?

He remembered the bond that he had created with the others, in Danganronpa 52, but now they were all outside, only he was left, trapped in there. Maybe they had already forgotten about him. Maybe Chiaki lied and once you go back in the real world you have your old memories and you don’t remember what happened inside. All he had were her words after all, could he trust them? Could he even trust this memory in the first place? Once you started to question a memory, all the others became dubious too.

‘Everyone… why I’m the only one left… I don’t want to be here alone, I need your help! I think I’m going crazy…’

He didn’t know if they were even still existing in the first place, but pleading to them was simply the only thing that he could do. He stopped hitting his head when he started to actually feel the physical pain of the blow. And angry red bump was forming on his forehead. Still trembling he sat up.

Another train of thoughts hit him.

There had been two Survivors from season 51 inside season 52. One was Byakuya, the Ultimate Survivor, who introduced himself with his old title, the Ultimate Affluent Progeny. Rantaro didn’t remember his talent at all, but both of them acted suspicious starting from day one. And both of them died in the first case. What about the other one? If he had to think in term of similitude… Who was the other person who was acting suspiciously? Who went crazy halfway through, or maybe from the very start? Who was the person who kept making strange comments, like that he was ‘disconnected from the world’?

Nagito.

‘Now I see it. I owe that guy an apology… Now I can totally see what he was going through. No wonder he was so incomprehensible. I am incomprehensible myself. I should have paid better attention. I should have tried harder to understand him. In the end, he was driven so far in his solitude, craziness and desperation that he killed himself in a desperate attempt to stop the season. And probably to stop the pain he was going through too. And I… I’m not that far from that… He started going completely mental after finding the file in the Funhouse. He must have remembered completely by that point, he even said that we were fakes. He was right. I wonder if the file was actually the Perk. The Survivor Perk. Rantaro said that he left a Video for himself… I wonder if I can find that… Not that it would really matter… we didn’t know who was the new mastermind, so the best I can hope for is a confirmation of my memories. Taking for granted that is not fake, it would be very easy to create a fake video using a casual face that they have implanted in my memory. What a nice thought.’

No proof in the whole wide virtual world was ever going to lift all the doubts. Kokichi was just that distrusting. He got up slowly, still shaking and sat on ‘his’ bed. He hugged his knees with one arm, biting his right thumb to distract himself from the still persistent pain in his forehead. What was he going to do now?

He felt the card key poking him in his stomach from his pocket and he pulled it out. He examined it in the light, making it spark, not searching for anything in particular. He had yet to check the underground tunnel, but was there even a point in doing so? There was no exit in the virtual world. Only the producers and managers of the show had the power to decide when to end the season. Should he force the season to end, just like Nagito did? Or should he just take a backseat and watch the others struggle without doing anything?

‘Should I even care about the others? They chose to come here, they had what they wanted. It’s not
really my fault or anything. They are just going back to the real world anyway, there is even a point in me saving any of them? No, not really, it’s wasted effort.’

He was maybe being extremely cruel, after all the people who chose to come here, himself included, were actually dead and buried by now. These people were innocent victims, much like himself.

‘Should I tell them any of this?’

Even this question was easily answered, no way in hell he should. They already didn’t believe him when he was just joking around, what were they going to do to him if he was to start talking about virtual reality and fake memories? He was more interested in another aspect. There were people who watched this, right? He was one too before, probably. Were they enjoying his suffering? Maybe even right now? Were they watching him right now? Another thought hit him.

‘If we are inside a virtual reality there is just no way that they don’t know what we are doing all the time. Even when we are taking a shower, every single moment. We are virtual avatars after all. Monokuma told me that our real bodies were being taken care of. So this is not my body, the pain I feel is probably coming from my brain, it’s a phantom pain, not real physical pain. Is there even a point in the Bugvacuum now? I can’t stop the cameras…’

Even while he was thinking this he realized that it was not entirely true. If this was a virtual reality the real aspect of things for the people outside should have been just a bunch of code. The programmers were following them everywhere, the audience not. It was impossible to see a game in his entirety, a player could only see what the programmers had set as camera inside the game itself. The little bugs around the fields were serving that function. He had no way to stop the programmers from seeing him but he could stop the spectators! He could use that to his advantage to cause mischief and preventing the people outside to see it, causing a bad continuity for the show itself. What if a murder was to happen off screen? The programmers could probably create a simulation to show them what happened but it would take more time than just broadcast it live… What if he was to keep from the audience some vital information?

Could he… piss off the audience so much to cause damage to Danganronpa itself?

He could. But was it a good idea? His life was in their hands after all. And they supposedly granted his wish. He wanted to trust Chiaki on that at the very least.

‘But, is this really okay? Giving emotional scars to kids? Is this really something that I want to see in the world I’m going to live in? At the very least I want revenge for all this pain and suffering they are making me go through!’

Kokichi needed more information. He needed to know exactly how much he could influence the show from the inside. He needed to know, with a lot more precision, the exact rules of the game, he had to move in complete legality. He didn’t want to have trouble in the real world, so he was going to give the show as much trouble as he could but still following the rules. He wanted a defendable position, he was going to play it smart.

Now he was certain that one of them was the mastermind, but he still had no clue on who that person was. And talking to that person directly could be a bad idea, they may want to protect their identity at the cost of making him retire from the show. Monokuma on the other hand, as a mascot of the show, was openly trying to appeal to the audience. He could try to steal some good info out of him. He needed to have a private meeting with him for that.

What better excuses than a motive?
Next time:
Where is *somewhere*?
Rantaro was surrounded by complete darkness.

He could not move his body at all, his mind was sluggish and his concentration kept swaying around without lingering anywhere. He was trying to remember how he got where he was but… where was he? He could not see anything, he didn’t even know if he was moving his eyes at all, was he even looking? Did he have his eyes closed? He couldn’t locate them at all, he could not open or close them. There was only darkness and silence. He was scared.

Suddenly, his ears started to ring, or maybe it was his head, or something else entirely, he had no idea. He didn’t know how long the ring went on, minutes, hours? He wanted it to stop, his head was starting to hurt. Wait, his head?

When he realized that he could feel his head again his whole body gave a jolt. Suddenly reconnected with his nerve endings everything started to go out of control at once. It was like waking up from a terrifying nightmare, his heart was pounding furiously in his chest, his breath was erratic, his head was hurting, his throat was burning, he had black spots in his vision. He tried to calm down, but his body was not obeying him, it was rebelling against the intrusion of his mind. Rantaro had the strange sensation that his body and mind had been separated for too long.

He observed his surroundings, it was all too white for his eyes, they started to tears up, but he could see that he was in a bed.

‘How strange, I was in the library and… Wait… the library?’

Images and sounds started to flood in his mind far too quickly for him to understand, the sharp pain made him close his eyes.

“It would be better if you could remember a bit at a time.” Rantaro opened his eyes when an unfamiliar voice sounded close to him. It was a doctor, his clothes were unmistakable, with white hair and a neutral expression. “Your permanence inside the Neo World Program was longer than it’s preferable so you have too many memory to sort out at the moment. Well, you’ll manage, sooner or later. Luckily the producers listened to me for once and decided to not give you two different sets of memories, like with that Nagito kid. They just erased the compromising part.” he shuffled around some papers. “The Kokichi kid is in a worse shape than you, especially since you got out pretty quickly in your second season. Lucky you, kid.”

The doctor spent more than two hours examining his body and telling him how he was doing. Apparently, he had lost seven kilograms and some muscular strength after staying connected to the machine for a year. Rantaro was listening only with one ear, he was too focused on putting everything in the correct order. He had absorbed every information about his memories that the doctor had given him, and every minute he was getting closer to the truth.

“There we go, this is enough.” he declared in the end. “You are not that bad, you won’t be able to walk for at least a three days but it’s not a big deal, you would be too tired to, anyway. Your friends are gathered outside, as soon as they saw you die in the 53rd season they all ran here to see you. Unfortunately, it’s best if you rest for a bit before meeting them, remember at your own pace, don’t force it. They are not going anywhere, I’m sure.”
With that, he left. Rantaro stared at the ceiling. He had been inside a school, right? There was that bicolor bear, Monokuma, and other fifteen high schoolers, just like him… And then the killing game and… he went to the library, following the advice that was inside the Pad, and… Shirogane Tsumugi killed him with a shot put ball.

But, how could he be dead if he was alive?

The two names had caught his interest. Nagito? Kokichi? The latter in particular… Sure, he remembered Kokichi, the Ultimate Supreme Leader with a knack for lies but… there was more than that. Was Nagito another one of the students? He kept repeating the two names in his head, along with Neo World Program, for a long time, he felt like he had something on the tip of the tongue but he could not… Kokichi.

Kokichi.

Leader.

Rantaro sat up suddenly, or at least he tried to, his body didn’t obey very well and he ended up falling back almost immediately.

‘Leader! Kokichi! Oh no, I’ve forgotten all about him! I’ve left him there alone!’

All the other memories came back, a bit slower this time, he remembered the others, his friends who fought with him that crazy situation. Now he was out, the others were there too, so the doctor said, and Kokichi was the only one left inside. He promised to protect him as Big Brother but he failed him. He wanted to see the others right now, maybe they knew something more than he did. Maybe they knew how to help him from there. He tried to get up again but stopped when he saw the clock on the wall, it was telling him that it was past midnight.

Defeated he sighed deeply, trying to calm down. He could talk with the others the next day, probably. He wanted to watch the television, he wanted to see if Danganronpa was being shown. His room didn’t have a television though. Rantaro realized that it was done on purpose to make sure that he would not end up watching it by accident. Rantaro cursed aloud, the only thing he could do was sleep and wait. He was a patient person, normally, not that day.

His tired body forced him to sleep at least three hours before the next day started. The doctor appeared again and tried to convince him to wait a bit more before forcing himself to confront the Danganronpa world. Rantaro could remain polite only because he knew that the man was really trying to help. In the end, the doctor agreed to let them visit and Rantaro kept sitting up every time he heard footsteps outside of his door.

He was almost starting to think that the doctor lied when noon rolled around. The impressive noise of running in the hallway was the only warning he got before the door swung open and a storm entered his room. Rantaro was extremely happy to see them all but he could only cringe when they all started to talk at the same time making a noisy mess.

“All RIGHT, EVERYONE, SILEEEEEENCE!!” Nekomaru shouted on top of his lung making them cover their ears.

Only silence followed, they all stared at him awkwardly, like they didn’t know what to say and he did the same, observing them all, one at the time. There was Mahiru, with her camera and her right arm linked to Hiyoko, who looked completely different, instead of her twin tails she had a single ponytail and she was much taller and mature that he remembered. Nekomaru was almost the same, only that his body was less imposing and his facial features were a little softer. Kazuichi had
discarded his hat, and his hair was a bit longer than it was before, but he winked at him with a thump up when he met his eyes. Peko and Fuyuhiko were standing side by side, she looked much calmer and mature, he was the same except that his eye was still in his right place. Teruteru was not really different, he looked away as soon as their eyes met with a guilty expression, being the first to kill had a big impact on him. Ibuki’s hair was shorter than before, but she was still dressed in her colorful manner. Sonia had an arm around Gundham’s waist, she looked a little less perfect than in the program, her hair was a little less shiny and her skin was a little less smooth but she was still very beautiful. Gundham didn’t have that scar or tattoo, Rantaro didn’t know which it was, on his face, his hair was a little less vertical than before and he didn’t have any bandages on his hand but he still wore a purple scarf. Rantaro wondered if he was still raising hamsters in it.

“Everyone,” he smiled brightly, “I missed you all so much!”

They all rushed to his side to hug him, fighting for who was getting the better angle, Rantaro didn’t say anything, he let them ruffle his hair, pinch his cheeks and shake him as much as they wanted. He was too happy and moved to even try to stop them. When the commotion started to die down he finally asked.

“Where are Byakuya, Nagito and Chiaki?”

They instantly calmed down and looked at each other. It was Sonia who broke the silence.

“They are too busy with the new season, but Byakuya sends his regards. I guess Nagito sent his too, if you want them. Chiaki said that she is going to visit you as soon as she can. About Mikan…” she looked away, unsure of what to say. “She is not very… friendly… anymore. They said that her connection with the machine had a big problem, her personality was mixed with the old one, so now she is half here half there… She is enjoying her fair share of interviews and popularity. Badmouthing all of us in the process… Kokichi especially, since she thinks that he is the one that eliminated her from the game. No one is really paying attention to her but…” Gundham placed a hand on her arm, stopping her from saying anything more.

“Rantaro,” Fuyuhiko stepped up, “we know that you just woke up, so we won’t pressure you. But one day, if you feel like, we can talk. We have a lot to talk about.”

“Guys,” he smiled in disbelief, “seriously? Are you trying to protect me? I want to help, no, I want to fight. Kokichi is all alone, trapped, we are not going to abandon our Leader, are we?”

All their faces opened in big smiles of relief. Rantaro laughed a little, his little brothers and sisters were all so cute. Maybe he didn’t have any real siblings, he still didn’t know about that, but he had brothers and sisters. No one was ever going to convince him otherwise.

“Hey man,” Kazuichi gave him another thumbs up, “you have to put yourself together as soon as possible, you have people to meet and things to do! We were late because we were following the first trial, sending our positive energy to Leader. Now that you are here too, we can figure out something!”

“The first trial… how did it go?” Rantaro’s heart tightened.

“Ah, it was really sad…” answered Mahiru with her arms crossed. “The boy Detective cried a lot. The execution was very brutal. I mean, I get sick watching our old executions… But this was not so far from that.”

“Boy Detective? You mean Shuichi? Why did he cry for Tsumugi? They didn’t seem all that close…” he was confused.
They all stared at him with blank faces.

“What… what do you mean Tsumugi?” asked Sonia. “Your killer was Akamatsu Kaede.”

“What?!”

Chapter End Notes

Next time at Present Side:
Kokichi will have a secret talk with Monokuma.
Kokichi swept the card key into the control panel that was at the entrance of the underground tunnel.

He didn’t have accesses to the Electrohammers, so he had to try his gut feeling. He was right. The production already predicted that someone would find the correct spot for the card and made sure that they could disable the traps inside without any external help. He walked and walked, the tunnel was unnecessarily long, but in virtual reality one could do what he wants, right? At the end was a big, metallic closed door. Next to it was another control panel, identical to the other one. He swept the card once again and a loud siren started to resonate through the whole tunnel making Kokichi grimace.

‘Well, at least I have no doubts that Monokuma knows that I’m here…’

The siren announced that the door was unlocked and Kokichi stood in front of it waiting. The door opened really slowly, an inch at the time, the outside was so bright that he had to avert his gaze. When he tried to look again the light became red. Red, just like the sky. Red, like the clouds. Red, like the dust on the road. Red, like the lightning that was illuminating the destroyed buildings.

Red.

Suddenly, he felt a lack of oxygen, his head was spinning. Putting his hands on his mouth and nose he tried to reach for the control panel to close the door. He didn’t go that far before feeling like he was losing all his strength on his legs and falling on his knees. With his blurred vision, he saw Monokuma drop from the ceiling and close the door for him. He coughed repeatedly trying to catch his breath. The siren announced that the door was now closed.

“Congratulation!! You reached the outside world!” the bear screamed on top of his lung. “Are you happy?!"

Kokichi got up faking difficulties to breathe for a bit longer than necessary to get his thoughts on the correct order. So this was the story the managers had chosen… Could he use this to his advantage? What was this supposed to be, a post-apocalyptic setting? His thoughts were moving at light speed, a blueprint of a plan already on his mind. First, he needed to extract some info from Monokuma if possible. He got up looking confident.

“Cute stage, but you don’t fool me, I know that this is a tv show.” he looked at his nails, faking disinterest. “Was that a real 3D model or just an optical illusion? I have to say, the poison gas to fake the absence of atmosphere was a nice touch, but apocalypse? Really? I was expecting more from the all mighty Danganronpa budget…”

He purposely let him believe that he did not remember the virtual reality part. The bear froze with his paws on his mouth, considering the situation. Then he slowly started to snicker.

“You really are a little bastard, aren’t you? How much do you know?”

“Ah, not that much.” he tried to gain as much as possible by revealing as little as possible. “Only that the flashback light malfunctioned and I vaguely remember taking part in this on my own. I remember trying to get into this cool show that gave fake personalities to people. I wanted to become a cool person too, you know? So, how’s the show going? Are you making many views?”
“My, my, my, what a dilemma you are putting me through…” he didn’t seem perturbed at all. “If you keep running your mouth the show is going to be ruined!”

“Oh, I’m not going to say anything to the others! I’m not stupid!” he was proposing a deal, and Monokuma knew it. It was his important show after all. Having to reset all their memories was going to be a big pain, it would cause tardiness in the broadcasting schedule too. “I’m not that stupid at all, actually, I want to win this. I’m the only one who can enjoy this game to the fullest, since I remember that it is one, and I don’t want to die either. I want to make it out of here alive!”

He tried his best to convey the concept that he was unaware of the virtual reality aspect. Now that the bait was out in the open he just needed the fish to bite.

“I see! That sounds really promising! I wonder if you can make this game more interesting…” he had a mocking tone. “It may even come to your advantage, you know?”

“Hmmm? What do you mean by that?” he raised an eyebrow.

“Since you already remember, there is no use hiding it! The audience votes, two times a week, his favorite participant. If the same person wins for a whole week we give that person some little reward… To help that person stay alive, to make the audience happy, you know what I mean?” he was still snickering with malevolence. “Sooo, you may want to win the audience preference, I’m going to let you choose your reward if you do, how does that sound?”

“I didn’t realize that a reward was being attributed.” he faked a look of confusion. “This sounds promising but can you give me some example? What reward did you give until now?”

“Well, you have ranked first place until Kaede’s execution, so your reward was to have your Motive Video from the start! I was really disappointed when I saw that you did nothing with that, you know? But people loved your ‘Insect Meet and Greet’ so I guess I forgive you. After her execution Shuichi won three times in a row, he is really popular!” Monokuma was speaking cheerfully. “We gave him the little piece of fabric as the final evidence for condemning Kirumi, he did such a good use of it! It was originally swept away so we made sure to put it back in plain sight! After that, you, Shuichi and Kaito are fighting for the top spot. None of you kept the first place long enough for a reward.”

Kokichi collected all these important information in his memory. So, basically, Monokuma tried to make him commit a murder using the ‘reward’ as leverage, and at the same time made Kirumi kill. He purposely chose the two of them to be the only ones that had their own video from the start. The second reward, instead, was to keep the game interesting. If Saihara-chan had failed to close the case the show would have ended on a very negative note. So, in conclusion, as long as he asked for something that would make the game more interesting Monokuma would probably agree without problems.

“I see, I see! And you call me a little bastard!” he smiled at him cheerfully. “I’m going to do just that! I’ll place in first place for a week and collect my reward! But I want to keep my request a secret for now! I don’t want to jinx my luck by expressing the desire before the shooting star appear!”

“Puhuhu! I can’t wait to see what an evil Supreme Leader can do!” with that he disappeared.

Kokichi returned to his room making an effort to look as cheerful and high spirited as possible. He closed the door behind him and smiling he stood in front of his whiteboard. The audience had to think that he was preparing an evil plan smiling. He thought about the first places that had resulted until that point. He could not have the bitter-sweet tragic backstory that Saihara-chan had with Akamatsu-chan. He was not cut for it and there were no conditions for him to create it. If he started
to swoon all over someone just to fake an infatuation the audience would immediately catch the trick. Momota-chan ranked high because he was the typical hero, always bright and confident, and because of his stupid flirt with Harukawa-chan. Love stories between the cool hero and the sad girl with a tragic past were like drugs for a lovesick audience. He definitely was not cut for that either. His first places were won because of the previous season. The same audience had followed the adventures of Ouma Kokichi, the Ultimate Supreme Leader, on an island full of palm trees. It was the nostalgia effect. Clearly, it was not working anymore.

He needed his own popularity. If he was still pretty high on the poll it was probably because of his over the top act as a liar and ‘evil’. He was probably making them smile, looking at him and think ‘look how hard that kid is trying!’ That was a good approach but he needed something bigger. Something that would catch everyone’s attention, forever. He needed to really become the Evil Supreme Leader. Not only that, for his plan to work he had to make them all fall into despair. He needed them to become boring. The post-apocalyptic scenario played right to his ally. He just needed to play it smart. His plan would work better with the Electrohammers too, so he needed to retrieve them. Just making them go at the end of the tunnel with the card would be anticlimactic as hell. Monokuma would never allow that.

He had to commit a murder. Not directly, the game would end if he were to win, and if he were to lose what would be the point? He had to make someone kill someone else for him. Who? He looked at the pictures on the whiteboard and started to eliminate them one by one. Not Saihara-chan, not Momota-chan, he could not convince Harukawa-chan by any mean, not Yumeno-chan or Shirogane-chan, not Iruma-chan she didn’t trust him anymore, not Kiibo, Kiibo was needed.

He had only one option really. He knew he had only one option from the start, he just didn’t want to admit it. Slowly he grabbed his picture and place it under the section for the killers. Then he pointed a finger at the picture.

‘Only you.’

His fate was sealed the moment Kokichi’s index finger touched Gonta’s forehead.

Chapter End Notes

Next time Somewhere:
Rantaro has a lot of questions, more and more keep coming.

Can you figure out what prize Kokichi wants?
(This is a seriously tricky question, you have to think back through the old chapters, something is missing from the canon. It's a very little detail I'll be absolutely impressed if you can spot it!)
Chapter Notes

About real names:
I've decided to give a tribute to some characters from DR1, it's just a tribute, don't speculate that they are maybe related or something because no, they don't exist in my universe. Disregard DR1, as I said Junko never happened and Hope's Peak doesn't exist. Later I'll explain some things regarding Byakuya for example, but don't think too deeply into the other names I'm gonna give, I have just chosen some of my favorite characters from DR1 and other games/media.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

“What did you say?!”

“Rantaro, please calm down! What do you mean when you say Tsumugi? She is the mastermind of this edition.” Sonia tried to pacify him.

“She is what?” it had the opposite effect.

“You fiend, don’t raise your voice against the Dark Lady, you want to taste a bit of my personal hell?!” Gundham placed himself between him and his girlfriend.

Rantaro took a deep breath.

“Yeah, you are right, I’m sorry.” he bowed his head a little. “I’m sorry Sonia, my bad. It's just that all of this is too confusing for me right now. I saw with my own two eyes Shirogane Tsumugi hitting my head with a shot put ball. I mean, I was turned and only saw her for a moment but I’m sure!”

“Are you saying,” intervened Mahiru, “they killed you and then place the blame on Akamatsu Kaede? To cover for the mastermind?”

“I would not put it past them!” spoke up Hiyoko with her usual nasty expression. “They are a bunch of retarded that would do anything for money! And that ‘Tsumugi’ bitch? She is just an obsessed fangirl! She is nothing like Chiaki!”

“We already knew that these people had a lot of dirt on them but MAAAN,” yelled Ibuki, “they are getting worse and worse! Now they are eliminating who they want?? They are like those fanboys that sneak into idol’s changing room pretending to deliver pizza!”

“Indeed,” Peko closed her eyes, “it seems that every day we learn something new. We should contact Byakuya in this regard.”

“Yes, you all do that,” Sonia spoke again, “I’m staying here a little longer, I think that Rantaro has many questions but we are too many, we are causing quite a scene. I’ll join you all later.”

After some moments they all agreed and wished Rantaro a good rest, only Gundham remained in the room, completely ignoring his clue to leave. Sonia smiled at him sweetly and asked him to wait for her outside and after a moment of hesitation he closed the door behind him. Sonia sat on the chair next to his bed.
“I’m sure you have many questions, the first one?” she politely asked him.

“Can I watch the show? Can I see how Leader is doing?” it was really his most pressing concern.

“Sure, I’ll speak with the doctors, I’ll make sure they deliver a television to your room. In any case, you cannot watch it right now, I guess… I guess I should start to explain how time work inside and outside the virtual reality.” she was pondering to herself.

“How time works…?” Rantaro was even more confused.

“Yes, you see, the virtual reality is a computer program. As such, it needs more time than the real world to process. To put it simply… The reality you are living inside is actually much slower than the real world. The time to process such a big mass of data and the selection of the footage to show… It takes some time. To be precise, a day inside the Neo World Program is actually six days outside. They show on tv only three hours of recording a day, only three instead of four because the hours that the people trapped inside spend sleeping are not being shown. So, they are selecting multiple cameras and point of views to always have something to show, even the days that are actually spent on sleep only. Which means that what we see on tv is actually not live footage at all. What we see has already happened hours ago for them. For example, this evening they are going to show Kaede’s trial on tv, but the actual trial took place yesterday starting from 9 am to 11 pm.” she stopped to collect her thoughts. Rantaro’s mind was going crazy with all this information. “For this reason, even if you are out of the virtual world since two days ago, the audience has seen you die only last evening. Kaede too, she is already out of the show, but she is being kept in her room until they show the trial on tv. She was connected to the machine for a very short period of time so she is perfectly healthy, but the journalists are waiting around this hospital to gather some spoilers. So she is not allowed outside at all.”

“But…” he tried to voice his doubt in a coherent manner. “If it has not been shown on tv yet… How do you know it?”

“Ah!” she smiled proudly. “Because we have an infiltrate! Well, more infiltrates… Byakuya is working backstage right now. He is the one that let us see the footage in exclusive! We have… help… from some people on the inside… I can’t really say much here.” she looked around troubled, like she was expecting to see a hidden camera somewhere.

“I understand,” in more senses than one, he could not shake off the sensation of being watched constantly either. “someday you’ll have to tell me everything.”

She nodded solemnly.

“Ask them to give me a tv, I want to watch the first trial.”

“Are you sure about that? Maybe it’s best if you don’t see you own murder scene…” she was hesitant.

“I’m sure, thank you Sonia.” he said firmly.

“Alright then.” she got up graciously. “I will leave you to your rest, but before that, I just thought that you may want to know… Your real name is Fukawa Ryoji. I don’t have access to the information regarding your family but if you ask I’m sure they will tell you… If you desire to know, that is.”

Rantaro felt an odd twinge of fear in his heart, he didn’t want to know, at least not yet. But he thanked her nonetheless, and he asked if she knew her real name.

“My birth name is Clearwater Celeste. I’m from England.” she said with a distant expression. “Still, I
would rather you call me with the name I’ve been reborn with. I’m Nevermind Sonia, and I’ll be her until the day I die.” she smiled bowing her head a little.

He stared at the door she left from for quite some time with a fond expression, he really loved all of them. Hearing her saying that she liked her new name better than her birth one had been very moving. After an hour some hospital workers brought a television in his room, they told him that Danganronpa aired starting from 9 pm. Even these people were looking forward to the first trial and they asked him to reveal who killed him in exclusive. He politely refused and prepared himself mentally. After dinner, he switched to the first channel and after some time a cheerful music and some bright special effects informed him that the show was starting. A big ‘DANGANDRONPA V3’ logo was shining on the screen. After the music ended a girl, a very familiar girl, greeted the audience.

“Gooooood evening my dear spectators! Your dear Shirogane Tsumugi, is here!!” she was screaming with her arms wide open to welcome the yelling of the audience inside the room. Rantaro stared at her with wide eyes, wasn’t she supposed to be **inside?** She was wearing a long light blue dress, she looked a lot more impressive than she did inside the Neo World Program. She had expensive jewelry and an aggressive makeup. She was everything besides **plain.** “As always we are presenting our special guest for the night! The one, the only… ULTIMATE LUCKY STUDENT, KOMAEDA NAGITO!!”

The camera shifted from her to the familiar guy that was seated on a white couch. He was wearing a white suit and while his hair was still messy and fluffy, his general appearance was much cleaner and neat. And he didn’t look as crazy as last time Rantaro saw him. Nagito bowed his head a little, greeting the audience that was screaming his name like a mantra.

‘What is that one doing there? Does he enjoy this? Just like Mikan?’

“Now, let’s not waste any time! Without further ado, let’s enter into the realm of the first class trial! I have to go, please enjoy our show! I’ll see you all later!” Shirogane waved at the audience and disappeared backstage.

Sonia had told him that the actual trial had taken place yesterday, where was she going? Then he realized, she was probably making in and out the virtual world to get the best of both. Since the time was much slower inside she could use little excuses, like going to the bathroom, to log out and interact with the audience and then go back in.

Rantaro observed as a man wearing a blue suit and Nagito started making predictions about the case and the culprit. They were really treating it like a game, Nagito’s attitude was sickening him. Then finally the trial started, it was really fancy, very different from what he had been used to in his first killing game. They had podiums and a whole room dedicated. His heartbeat grown faster when he saw Kokichi standing inside his podium. His Leader was so different from the first killing game! Not only his physical appearance, his clothes were completely different, he looked almost malicious. He was not giving educated guesses like last time, he was straight flat accusing people while maintaining a cheerful aura. It was pretty painful to watch but after a while Rantaro could actually see the old Kokichi inside him. He was just faking disinterest to protect himself. Rantaro’s heart squeezed in anguish. He wanted to go back inside and give the guy a hug.

He tried to focus on the others, especially Shuichi, Kaede and Shirogane. It was really painful, until the very end he hoped that Kokichi would uncover the actual truth and condemn Shirogane. The girl played dumb until the very end, even when she said that she left the dining room to go to the bathroom. He had not seen how she had done it exactly, but she had killed him passing through the hidden door. He could rewatch the footage from the previous hours but he was already sure that the
production didn’t show that. The audience would be mad if they knew that the mastermind killed someone just because Kaede’s trap didn’t work properly.

He could not watch the execution, it was too brutal, too cruel. Hearing Shuichi cry made everything even worse. He felt sorry, if he hadn’t let himself get killed so easily all this could have been avoided. It was not his fault, he knew, but he felt extremely hopeless. He wanted to talk to Kaede, reassure the poor girl. He was going to, for sure. He tried to sleep but he could not really rest.

The next day after breakfast Kazuichi showed up.

“Yo man! I figured you would want as much info as possible, so I brought you a present!” he showed a DVD with ‘Danganronpa 52 Specials’ written on it. Smiling he insert the DVD inside the tv player and paused it, then he sat next to Rantaro’s bed. “These specials were broadcast between the 52nd and the 53rd season. First, you need to know that ever since Danganronpa 45 two Survivors are selected, before only one was selected. This rule was implemented because the audience loved some ‘characters’ just too much and they wanted a repeat. You probably think that you spent a year inside the Neo World Program, after the end of our season, but that’s not technically correct. Since the time inside is so slow you didn’t realize but you spent only 6 months alone with Leader. Well, it’s still a lot of time, I don’t doubt it. Now, this was broadcasted after the end of the 52nd season…”

Kazuichi pressed a button on the remote and the video started. On the screen was Shirogane once again, greeting the audience in the same way. The screen behind her showed the two of them, Rantaro and Kokichi, in a flashy pose with their titles written near them in vivid colors.

“Everyone! Welcome!” she was screaming from the tv. “I’m Shirogane Tsumugi and I’m going to be the host and mastermind for the 53rd season of Danganronpa! Let’s make this season the best yet! As per tradition, once again you are all going to vote for your favorite! I want you to decide which one, between our beloved Big Brother and our beloved Leader, is going to keep his talent and which one will get the title of Ultimate Survivor! Please, try to think which of them will benefit better from a change and which from remain the same!”

Then she explained all the possible ways of voting and made a lot of other comments about them and their talents and how they could be useful in the next killing game. Rantaro was feeling sick. Kazuichi quickly caught on and stopped the video. After a bit, he spoke again.

“This is called ‘The second season bonus’. I don’t think you feel like you were given a bonus, though. They added a rule inside the contract for this, basically, you can get two chances at winning, depending on how well you did in your first season. They would have added a third round too, if not for the doctors. Staying more than a year inside the Neo World Program can kill you. So, for the better or the worse, this is the last season for Kokichi, they won’t let him become the next Survivor. Still, someone else in the group is.” he hesitated a moment. “Ready to continue?”

Rantaro nodded firmly and observed the screen again. The scene was almost the same, only Shirogane was dressed differently.

“Welcome back! How was your winter vacation? Ready to enter the new killing game?!” she was still yelling enthusiastically. “Before taking a sneak peek into the new cast for this season it is time to discover the results! Who, between Rantaro and Kokichi, was chosen to be the next Survivor? Let’s see!”

The screen behind her showed a black line that divided it into two halves and the words Ultimate with a question mark. The audience did the drum roll and then cheered loudly when the pictures appeared behind the two titles. In his portrait he was was seated on a chair with a mysterious
expression that Rantaro was not really sure he ever made in his whole life, behind him the title of Ultimate Survivor. Kokichi was wearing his new outfit, a black cape and a black hat. He was showing an evil smile and he had his arms open, like he was feeling on the top of the world. Rantaro was frustrated at the sight of how they had desecrated his cool talent making him look like some evil dictator.

“Pretty bullshitting, right?” Kazuichi commented with a snort. “Kokichi won the survey for keeping his talent with 97%. Basically, everyone wanted to see him as the Leader of the group again. Shirogane, though, decided that this idea was boring so she made sure to change Leader’s personality just enough to make him a different ‘character’. Chiaki said that they amplified his distrusting nature. What a bunch of sick bastards they are.”

Rantaro had fewer and fewer doubts. The Neo World Program had a lot of potential to do good, but they were using it in a completely wrong way. Changing people’s personality on a whim, without even ask for permission, only to make a show more entertaining was inexcusable.

“Kazuichi, can you help me? I want to talk with Kaede.”

Chapter End Notes

Next time at Present Side:
All ready to ride the angst train?

The name Ryoji is a little tribute to Mochizuki Ryoji, from Persona 3.

In case you have not done the math and you are confused: 24 hours / 6 days = 4 hours a day.
I've taken a whole page of notes about this, I've actually calculated all the days, what's going on inside and outside.
Yes, I'm just that crazy :')
When Kokichi left his room it was already nighttime.

Outside of the dormitory Saihara-chan, Momota-chan and Harukawa-chan were doing sit-ups on the grass. Kokichi felt a big wave of irritation and jealousy, why were they having a great time while he was suffering? He knew that he was being irrational but he didn’t care, he didn’t care about anything anymore. He reached the computer room and saw Iruma-chan inside. He waited and waited. Finally, the girl left to go to the bathroom and he went inside to check the specifics of that program she was working on. The Neo World Program.

He was pretty sure that it was not ‘the original’ program, only a less powerful virtual copy. Funny how the story writers thought about doing a virtual world scenario inside the virtual world. He was not a genius about computer programs so most of the stuff that was written inside was flying above his head but he got some useful information, like the fact that the program actually would kill people who were to be killed inside. It was different from the real Neo World Program.

Then he saw that the girl was doing some modification to the program, she was editing the map of the virtual world. The details were not very clear, though. She was still working on it so there was nothing he could do right now. Another modification caught his eye. Iruma-chan had set some parameter on her avatar, she was classified as an object. These modifications were too odd, she had something in mind… and what could she have in mind inside a killing game? This was not going to help her escape unless she was going to use it to murder someone. Well, wasn’t he searching for a potential victim? Killing her was going to save someone and give him free reign over the Electrohammers, Electroboms and Bugvacum. Once dead, she could not talk to the others about these objects, right?

He started to feel sick, what was he becoming…? He was hating himself so much. Maybe he should just talk to the others… No, he couldn’t. They would never believe him and he had promised to try his best to prevent more murders. Even if he did nothing, Iruma-chan would go ahead on her own and kill someone. And Monokuma was waiting for him to do something… He was tired. Too tired to take a serious decision, he decided to wait and see what would happen the next day.

Inside his room, he curled up into a ball and tried to sleep. He was feeling cold and alone like never before. No one was going to greet him with a smile the next day. He missed his friends terribly. They would be able to make him feel happy and to dissuade him from doing something that he was going to regret. Iruma-chan and Gonta were simply going to wake up in the real world, but he would never forget what he was about to cause.

The next day he was feeling like shit and the mood in the dining room was pretty in sync with him. Gonta was arguing with Shirogane-chan, Momota-chan and Yumeno-chan. The big guy was insisting that it was time for him to fight against Monokuma.

“Gonta want to risk life for everyone, like a true gentleman!”

“Don’t do that man! Risking your life fighting bare hands won’t help anyone!” yelled Momota-chan.

“And it would be completely meaningless, even if you destroy him and the Exisals the killing game won’t end.” he said casually. They all stared at him, confused. “Actually, why would you want to
stop the killing game? It’s just starting to get to the good part! You guys are just a bunch of cowards!” Momota-chan raised his fist staring daggers at him. “Don’t tell me… you guys aren’t confident enough to win the game? Well, in my case I’m full of confidence! I’ll win this game no matter what!”

“Are you planning to become the next blackened then?” asked Harukawa-chan with a cold voice.

“Me…? The next blackened?” she hit too close home to comfort. “Yeah, sure, if I can win that way, then why not?”

“Are you being serious?” Saihara-chan was staring him in the eyes with a tense expression.

“Of course! Games are only fun when you take them seriously, right? So c’mon guys! Let’s enjoy this more! It’s not every day you get to play a killing game!” he was doing his best to stay consistent with what he told Monokuma. That this was a fun game to win. “Sooo, who want to be the next victim?! The game can’t go on if no one dies, so someone kill already! If you don’t do anything then I’ll have to kill someone instead! Just like I promised, okay?!”

“That’s enough!!” Momota-chan sprint towards him yelling, he had a scary expression on his face. Kokichi would have been scared had he not known that this was a virtual world so nothing he could do to him was going to matter. Momota-chan’s fist connected with his cheek hard. He could feel the spot growing hot with running blood. This was going to leave a bruise. Kokichi hadn’t even tried to dodge, he deserved it, all of it. He deserved even more. He was a horrible person. “Kokichi?! What’s gotten into you?! You were messed up to begin with but this is a whole new level of weird! If you keep acting like this… I’m gonna knock your senses back into you!!”

‘No, Momota-chan, this is pushing me in the opposite direction. Because you are right. I was messed up to begin with, so messed up that I signed willingly into this shit, so now I have a responsibility to see this through the end…’

Kiibo intervened saying that violence was not the right answer and eventually Momota-chan dropped his clenched fist to his side.

“Tsk… Fine… I’ll stop for now. Kokichi, I hope that stupid speech of yours was a lie.” he threatened him.

“Maybe Gonta really has to do it…” the Entomologist broke the silence. “If friends are going to fight like this then Gonta go fight Monokuma.”

Friends… Gonta considered him a friend. A part of Kokichi thought that this was perfect for his plan, the other part was praying for him to start hate him so he would not listen to him.

“There is no need for that!” it was Iruma-chan who stopped him. “I, the gorgeous girl genius, Iruma Miu, will save you all! Got that?! Wait a little longer and I’ll bring you to a world where the killing game doesn’t exist! I’ll keep my plan a secret… ‘cause I love being a tease…” she started playing with her hair.

“Nye… I have a bad feeling about this…” commented Yumeno-chan lazily.

The girl was seriously going to kill someone after luring everyone into the virtual world. Who was she planning on kill though? Kokichi himself probably. She hated him now, for some reason, and she was probably scared that he was going to do something about the Electrohammers. She probably wanted to silence him. It was time to act. He was going to give her a warning first, if she still wanted to go through with this then…
After leaving the dining room he tried to hide somewhere waiting for Gonta to be alone but Saihara-chan was following him. He could ditch him if he wanted but it was best not exaggerate too much, if they were to tie him up somewhere he wouldn’t be able to do anything to stop Iruma-chan. She would only change objective, not plan. He kept walking with a normal pace faking obliviousness.

“Ouma-kun, wait a minute.” Saihara-chan called him.

Kokichi stopped and faked a look of surprise.

“Oh, Saihara-chan! What do you want, my favorite Detective?” he tried to smile cheerfully but his cheek hurt making him grimace.

Saihara-chan looked conflicted. His gaze shifted from his cheek to his eyes to the floor and then back to his cheek.

“Are you okay?” his voice was almost a sigh.

He looked like he was finally getting tired of his antics. How fitting. It was only fitting that the only person that was still putting up with his horrible personality was going to give up on him right now. He almost wanted to laugh, or cry, one of the two.

“Of course I’m okay! What, this?” he pointed at his cheek and then shrugged. “Momota-chan’s punches are really weak, you know! He is all bark and no bite, even during training, right? He always finds an excuse to not do anything!”

Saihara-chan looked away, displeased.

“Really. Well, I think you kinda deserved that.” merciless Saihara-chan was merciless.

“Of course you think I did.” he whispered. “I’m not allowed to talk about your precious friend, right?”

“There are moments when I wonder if this is your true self. Because if it is, I don’t think I like it.” Saihara-chan went for the kill.

“Good thing that I don’t like you either, then!” he said as cheerfully as he could. “I can finally stop put up with you, then, right?”

It was the first time Kokichi actually saw him show anger on his face, even when he was facing murderers he was still keeping his cool. Not now.

“Right. It’s really a good thing.”

He turned his back to him and walked away. Kokichi’s heart was engulfed in a sick, twisted triumph. He had done it. He had finally proved that even a saint like Saihara-chan could not put up with him. He had finally proven that no one would ever want to be by his side forever. Even his friends… even them would be sickened by him before he could rejoin them in the real world. They were surely watching him right now, hoping to see a good, nice guy leading them all to the end. Instead what they were seeing was a pathetic, disgusting little kid playing God. A sick twisted personality finally revealed. They were surely adverting their eyes, regretting liking him even for a bit. He was alone. Forever.

Time to fuck things up a bit more and make Gonta become a killer.
Next time Somewhere:
Rantaro meets Kaede and things start to be set in motion.

Brace yourself, this is only the beginning!

I want to thank EVERYONE, you are all of great moral support for me!
Kudos in particular to all the people who commented so far, if I'm having so much fun
with this is all thanks to you!
Kazuichi had been able to convince the doctors to lend him a wheelchair.

They were in front of Kaede’s door, Rantaro knocked. A voice from inside invited them in and Kazuichi opened the door for him. In a room identical to his own, sitting on the only bed, was the girl that Rantaro had first met inside the killing game, inside the virtual world. She recognized him immediately and her eyes widened, her whole figure tensing up. Rantaro felt guilty, the poor girl was sure that she had killed him. Maybe, she was even afraid that he was going to accuse her or something. He tried to make his most reassuring smile, the one he reserved for crying children.

“Good afternoon, Kaede. Don’t be scared, you didn’t kill me.” he said as firmly as possible.

Her mouth opened and her eyes filled with tears, she started shaking.

“But… but…” she was already crying by the time Rantaro had reached her bed and took her hand in his.

“Will you believe me?” he stared right into her eyes until she nodded, wiping her face with her sleeve.

“But… but how…” she tightened the grip in his hands.

Rantaro explained it all, included his first participation and his relationship with Kokichi. He made sure to explain clearly that it was Shirogane who had killed him. Kaede was more and more surprised by the minute. At some point Kazuichi left them, saying that he wanted to see the footage of the day in advance. It was almost dinner time when Rantaro finally finished explaining everything.

“They had told me about some of it…” she had finally calmed down. “Like the fact that I had chosen to enter in the Neo World Program on my own… They even showed me the contract with my name written on it… Ah, by my name I mean… Apparently, I’m called Kyoko… Kyoko Naegi. Strange, right?” she laughed weakly. “But you and Kokichi being second timers? Shirogane as the mastermind? I’m… I don’t know what to say…”

“That’s pretty normal, I think.” he offered a sympathetic look. “You don’t have to say anything, really. We need to look at the future now.”

“About that… I don’t know what to do…” she fidgeted with her sheets. “They asked for my cooperation for an interview during tomorrow’s broadcast. I haven’t answer yet. I don’t want to go, but… I feel that this could be my only chance to know what is happening to the others…”

“Really? They have not asked anything of me…” Rantaro was conflicted. What would he do in case they asked? Now that he thought about it, Nagito was there, so eventually they would ask him too, right? “But they are probably going to…”

“I think I’ve decided after talking to you.” her voice was more confident. “I want to look Shirogane in the eyes and see for myself if she has the courage to smile to my face!”

Rantaro could understand fully where she was coming from. He wanted to look her in eyes as well. See if she was feeling guilt at all.
A nurse interrupted them and asked Rantaro to return to his room before dinner was served. Rantaro patted Kaede’s hand and left her with a smile. Once in his room, he ate and then watched Danganronpa again. This time they talked much more than last time, Shirogane remained outside for the whole show, while the others inside were sleeping. She spoke with some ‘opinionists’ and Nagito about Kaede’s execution. Then they showed some kind of survey about whom the audience considered their favorite to win the game and another one for the most popular ‘character’ of the first phase. In the popularity pool, Shuichi was first, while Kokichi was second and Kaito third. In the favorites to win pool, the winners were again Shuichi and Kaito. Rantaro noticed that Shirogane was not included in this one at all. The rules were ensuring that she could not win, no matter what. Shirogane was the mastermind after all, even Chiaki had to leave before the end. They only showed a little bit of the participants. They were all sleeping, except for Shuichi who was crying inside Kaede’s Lab. Rantaro fell asleep feeling heavy.

The next day Rantaro insisted to start his rehabilitation. He wanted to start making himself useful as soon as possible. After lunch, Fuyuhiko showed up, he was in a bad mood.

“Yo. How are you?”

“I’m fine, thanks, what about you?” Rantaro asked him.

“Those bastards… They tried to convince me to let them speak with you. They want you in the studio, as honored guest, like Nagito.” he shook his head. “They really can’t leave people alone! It’s almost a year since they’ve been trying to convince us to go.”

“They are trying to convince you all?” Rantaro wanted more information.

“Every time a season ends, they try to get as many participants as they can to come as honored guests. It ‘makes the show more entertaining’. Basically, they want us to speculate about who is gonna get killed next, why someone did what they did and stuff like that. It’s pure garbage, let me tell you. Have you seen Nagito? He is… technically… on our side but I just can’t forgive him. Not only for all the shit he made us eat inside the Neo World Program, but for all of this too. He is accepting their offer to participate every night…”

“I’ve only seen him on the show. Mikan isn’t participating?” he tried to question more.

“Well, they mostly invite the people that are loved by the audience…” he hung his head. “Like Sonia, Gundham, Kazuichi, Peko and me. We receive offers every week. And now you’re on the list too. Mikan was welcomed at first, but you see, fans love us. Mikan kept badmouthing all of us and the audience started to complain about her presence. You see less and less of her nowadays. Nagito and Byakuya, as survivors, are the most beloved by the audience. Byakuya doesn’t participate in the show, he just can’t keep his cool. He tried a couple times and he came too close to revealing his true feelings about the show. If they notice our dislike, they will try to keep us as far as possible from the Danganronpa fandom. Protecting their interests and all that shit.”

“And Nagito?”

“Nagito is, supposedly at least, working for us from the inside. I don’t really know the whole plan, only Byakuya and Chiaki knows, but they are somehow trying to make the show lose its popularity. I don’t even know if that’s possible… Don’t search your name on the internet… You won’t like what you’ll find.” he said with a blush.

“What?”

“You know… fanart… fanfiction… stuff…” he blushed even more deeply.
Rantaro decided to leave that aside and focus on one problem at a time.

“What about all of you?” he insisted. Fuyuhiko looked confused. “What are you all doing to fight?”

Fuyuhiko looked down with an ashamed expression. He forced himself to speak.

“Not much… Byakuya and Chiaki asked us to help them with some appearances on the show… They wanted all of us to cooperate. But… after the end of the season most of us just wanted to start a new life… We took a majority vote and decided to not appear on the show. None of us has ever accepted an interview. We only kept in touch with them to ask about you two…” he paused for a moment. “I’m ashamed of myself honestly… I feel like I have abandoned you two without fighting…”

“Fuyuhiko.” Rantaro smiled at him. “I don’t blame any of you for taking a vacation. You could not have helped before anyways. Now, however, it’s time to fight. Don’t you agree? I won’t force anyone to appear on the show but **we have to do something.** I’m going. I’m going as an honored guest, Kaede is going too. We are going to fight, from right there.”

Fuyuhiko stared at him for a moment before nodding firmly.

“I’m going to talk to the others. There are others that wanted to fight. Sonia and Gundham were furious about this too. I’m going to make this work this time… For Leader.”

Rantaro nodded.

“For Leader.”

Later that day, Kaede visited his room to inform him that she was going to participate in the show, that same night. Rantaro wanted to ask her to wait for him, to confront this challenge together, but he knew that it was not his place to stop her. He watched the show with his breath held. The audience greeted her with a big round of applause. Rantaro could see the irritation on her face. It couldn’t be pleasant to be applauded for having been murdered. She was wearing a beautiful cream-colored dress with a long skirt and her hair was styled in an elegant style held together by silver hairpins. She looked like a lady in a music theater, ready to see La Traviata.

She was gorgeous. Rantaro was lost in thought wondering if this could be what she would wear during a piano concert. If not, it was a waste.

Once again, Shirogane spent the whole night outside of the program, and she did it, she smiled at Kaede as if they were old friends. Rantaro could clearly see the Pianist clenching her dress as if she wanted to contain herself. He regretted not asking her to wait for him. He really should’ve.

The night became a torture for him. He had to observe impotently as Shirogane and the studio audience asked her to explain her murder trick. How she thought of it and why she did it. Then Nagito asked her if she was a lucky person. Kaede was clearly confused, she couldn’t recognize him, for her, Nagito was a regular person. Rantaro wanted to punch himself for his stupidity. He should have helped her better. She answered that she was average. Nagito smiled and said that **for a plan so risky to have worked so splendidly, she must have had even more luck than him.** Rantaro was out of breath.

‘Good thing that that one is on our side. What a fearful enemy!’

Finally, they let her off the hook and they showed the participants waking up for the new day. They showed as Kaito went to wake up Shuichi and then the talk in the dining room. Rantaro’s heart squeezed painfully as he heard Kokichi say that gullible people would be killed. He knew that his
Leader was amnesiac and had suffered a change in his personality, but to hear him say such hopeless truths so openly was still painful. Then when he observed the faces of the other participants, he realized another hopeless truth.

‘They hate him. All of them hate him!’

That pained him even more. Kokichi was a genius in understanding human nature, but he himself was not that far off. He had seen a deep solitude inside the short guy on first sight. Kokichi was purposely keeping people away from his heart. It had been a pleasure to see him finally open up a bit to them. Now he was alone. Completely alone. His heart was closed and surrounded by barbered wire.

He was too distracted to properly focus on the show, as the participants explored the new areas of the school.

He had a nightmare that night. He dreamt of Kokichi crying alone, curled up into a ball while the others were calling him a little lying monster.

During the next day, he gave his absolute best to the rehab exercises and the doctor told him that he could be discharged the next day. Rantaro finally felt like he was doing something useful. When Ibuki went to visit him, Rantaro asked her to buy him a phone, afterwards, he saved all the numbers of the 52nd season participants into it. He wondered how to get Kaede’s number. Ibuki promised that she would look into it herself.

The night came way too early for his liking, but he forced himself to watch Danganronpa again. Only Nagito was present that night. They mostly followed the participants around the school, Kokichi was shown briefly, he was talking with Gonta near a rock with ‘horse a’ written on it. Rantaro recognized it. It was his clue. He remembered that the Admin had told him they would put two clues around the school for him. They were supposed to open the vault inside his Lab. Unfortunately, Kokichi had no use of it now.

The last scene they showed was of a thing called a ‘flashback light’. They used it and a video appeared on the screen. It was a complex backstory about some Ultimate Hunt. Rantaro could remember this information. He had it from the start; it was part of his Survivor Perk. Now, apparently, the other participants had it too. Not that it mattered at all, it was just flavor for the show.

He saw Kokichi massaging his temples with a pained expression and he wondered why he was reacting differently than all the others.

Chapter End Notes

Next time on Present Side:
Shuichi is trying and Kokichi is lying.
How typical.

Do you like Kaede's birth name?
She is not Makoto and Kyoko's daughter or anything, seriously, I just wanted to give her a cool name :')

The quiz of the day! (?)
A certain Admin had been mentioned two times already...
It is already possible to know who he is... if you have a very active imagination!
He is not an original character, you should know him (if you are a big fan of
Danganronpa in general).
If you have an idea, please put only the initials, I want this to be a surprise for most
people.
Like this: Ouma Kokichi= O. K.
And tell me his hair color, just to be safe.
Kokichi found Gonta alone in the courtyard.

The big guy really loved bugs, he used every free moment to look for them. Sadly, he would never find bugs in a virtual world. They were probably a pain to program.

“Hey Gonta!” he called up to him. “I require a little service from you! You want to save everyone, right?”

“Gonta want to help…” he hesitated. “But Gonta not sure he can trust Kokichi after Insect Meet and Greet…”

“What are you talking about? The Insect Meet and Greet worked great! Now they have a lot more respect for you, right?” more like fear. “And we didn’t even do anything wrong! Toujo-chan went and killed on her own, you have nothing to do with that. But if you are worried… then I’ll tell you what I want, it’s really easy!”

Gonta pondered for a moment before nodding.

“Okay, Gonta want to help…”

“I have asked Iruma-chan to make some special weapons, just for us. They will allow us to fight against Monokuma! Isn’t that great? We can save everyone! We can reach the end of the tunnel with them! So, what I want is your help carrying them and then another little favor. You see, Iruma-chan will give us the weapons but in exchange, she need help setting up her little project, remember what she told us in the dining room? That she is going to save us all? Don’t you want to help her?” he concluded as innocently as he could.

“Oh, Gonta see! Kokichi had a good idea! Making Miu create weapons for fight!” Gonta’s eyes were shining with hope. Kokichi had to ignore the bitter taste in his mouth. “Gonta help!”

Kokichi smiled and led the way, they reached Iruma-chan’s Lab and Kokichi asked Gonta to wait for him outside. He entered the Lab alone, the Inventor was inside as he predicted. As soon as the girl saw him, she grabbed the first thing that she could, a metal pipe, and swung it in front of his face.

“What are you doing here you little abortion? Don’t even try to get closer to me! After what you said in the dining room, I know that I was right in sending you away!” her voice was violent.

Kokichi tilted his head innocently.

“I’ve come to take the Electrohammers.”

“Yeah, right!” she yelled. “Take another step and I’ll kill you myself!”
“I would think twice about that if I were you.” he kept his voice neutral.

“Keh! Tell me why should I!” she laughed.

He didn’t answer, he pointed slowly toward the window without breaking eye contact. She was the first one to break it and look at the window, unsure. On the other side of the glass was Gonta. He was pressing his palms and nose against the window, staring inside. When he noticed that they were staring back at him, he waved at them with a smile. Iruma-chan immediately hid the metal pipe behind her back with a panicked expression. Kokichi waved back at him with a smile, and then turned his head back toward Iruma-chan.

“Can I have the Electrohammers now or should I ask him to get them for me?” his voice was sweet.

Iruma-chan was about to pop a vein on her forehead but she grabbed the Electrohammers from the place where she had hidden them. The six hammers rattled on the floor where she had thrown them. They were too many and they were too big to carry in one go, at least alone. He called Gonta with a cheerful voice and the big guy grabbed them all in one tight hug. Then Kokichi told Iruma-chan that he was going to help her set up the virtual world the next day. Iruma-chan tensed up even further and didn’t answer. Gonta bowed his head to her politely and then followed him outside. Kokichi led him to the entrance hall and opened the secret passage to his Lab. Gonta was impressed by his Lab, he looked like a little kid. After the surprise effect ended, Gonta asked him why he was hiding the hammers inside his secret Lab. Kokichi did his signature laugh and told him that his Lab was hidden from Monokuma’s eyes, so it was a safe spot. Clearly, it was a lie.

Kokichi had picked his Lab because no one else knew about it, surely, but more importantly because he was trying, in a sorta mess up way, to apologize to him. To show him his trust in him. No one else ever came even close to earning the right to the entrance to his Lab.

They left and Kokichi made him promise not to tell anybody about the location of his Lab. He said that it was to ensure that Monokuma would not eavesdrop on him. Kokichi knew that Gonta would not have been able to keep a secret if he asked without giving him a selfless reason.

They separated and Gonta went back to his dorm room. Kokichi, instead, went down into the game room, a place that no one else was frequenting, and called Monokuma. The bear appeared again, just like always, and Kokichi explained Iruma-chan’s plan in the virtual world. Then he asked Monokuma to put a flashback light with a memory of the ‘outside world’ in it. He convinced him saying that the audience would love the gigantic mess he was about to create. Monokuma snickered and agreed without a second thought. Kokichi could not decide if the bear trusted him or if he was sure that the audience would love anything anyway.

After assuring this last piece of his puzzle, he went back to his room. He sat on his bed for a long time, his mind empty, and his body cold. Then he got up and placed Iruma-chan’s picture next to Gonta’s. Killer and victim, once again. Only this time it was not a fact that he had to accept, it was a fact that he had to create.

His sleep was haunted by the faces of his friends, looking down at him with disgust. Gundham was looking at him with complete hate. Rantaro was shaking his head, disappointed.

That morning Kokichi could not muster the will to get up. He did not want to. He was cold and sad. He wanted to cry but couldn’t. He did not deserve it. Deep inside himself, he wanted someone, he knew whom, but he was not going to think his name, to knock on his door. He wanted someone to enter his room, sit on his bed and talk to him. He wanted someone to tell him that he could stop thinking. That he could stop trying, that he could enjoy the end of the show like a spectator, hanging out with people, making friends like a normal person. He wanted someone to save him from himself.
But, he knew the truth and they didn’t. He could never be on the same page as them. More importantly, if not him, who would try to shut down this shitty show? He could turn a blind eye. He could turn his head and let everything go with the flow. He could ignore everyone’s suffering. But, just as his friends would never forgive him for provoking someone’s death, they would not forgive him for not doing anything either. And Kokichi had already decided which hate he preferred. And so, he got up.

When he finally left his room, it was way past breakfast. Walking slowly, he saw Gonta and Miu carrying some chair, most likely to the computer room. Gonta really was reliable.

He briefly considered eating breakfast, but decided against it. His stomach was already upset as it was. He was making his way to the computer room when he met Saihara-chan. The Detective froze in place when he spotted him.

“Ah…”

Kokichi ignored him entirely. It was not the right day for this. He turned his back and descended the stairs he was previously climbing.


He kept ignoring him. Saihara-chan picked up the pace and caught up to him. He called his name again while reaching for his arm but stopping before he could touch him. Kokichi knew that he could not ignore him for much longer. Bracing himself, he faced him with a malevolent grin.

“I thought we were not going to put up with each other anymore?” he tried to sound as malicious as he could.

Saihara-chan’s expression didn’t falter. They stared at each other for a bit in silence.

“But that is a lie, isn’t it?” he said calmly.

Kokichi kept his grin firmly in place but he was collapsing internally. Saihara-chan just had to use his own catchphrase against him, hadn’t he? Kokichi could not decide if he wanted to affirm or negate that. He wanted to do both and neither.

“I’m sorry, I’m tired. I snapped at you without really wanting to.” Saihara-chan kept talking with a soft, soothing voice. “I don’t know what you were trying to do, why you said all that stuff… But, I trust you. I have understood that you would not truly hurt anyone. You just have a bad way of expressing yourself, right?”

Kokichi wanted to scream. He wanted to scream and take him by the shoulders and shake him strongly, and scream. And scream. Why was he trusting a future murderer? He would not hurt anyone? He had a bad way of expressing himself?

‘Let’s see! Let’s see if you will feel the same tomorrow!’

A raging beast was contorting inside him. He wanted to punch and bite and slap and hurt him. Because stupid, forgiving, trusting, hopeful Saihara-chan was a fool. A fool who was going to get hurt badly by a future murderer. And why? What on Earth was compelling him to pursue this masochistic way of thinking? Why him? He had his stupid Astronaut friend, he didn’t need him at all. He was not desperate for company. Kokichi really wanted to punch him.
“You don’t know that, I’m the type that would do anything for fun!” he said with his most suggestive voice.

Saihara-chan kept staring at him firmly. Waiting for something. What, Kokichi could not fathom.

“Well, I have a lot of work to do, Saihara-chan, see you later!”

He left him there.

He could feel eyes on his back for a very long time.

Chapter End Notes

Next time Somewhere:
Rantaro gets an apartment and visits the Danganronpa empire.

I don't have anything cool to say today... >.<
Thanks for reading :3
Outside of the hospital, his friends were waiting for him.

Rantaro was still walking slowly, hesitantly, but they didn’t mention it, they distracted him during the entire walk to the taxies. After they separated into smaller groups, they got in and started to chat about the residential complex where they each had a small apartment, funded by Team Danganronpa, where most of them where residing at the moment. Some of them had already returned living with their families, since they were pretty similar to the one in their memories. Rantaro was still not ready to learn about his family, he wanted to close this chapter of his life first; he had already too many things on his plate.

The residential complex was cute, not too over-the-top or extravagant, which was suitable for people who didn’t want to attract too much attention. The day flew pretty quickly, his friends helped him get settled and went to do some shopping for daily necessities and prepared a welcome back party for him. Teruteru cooked a whole banquet meal; even if he was not really the Ultimate Cook, he still loved cooking. Ibuki set up a stereo system and started to DJ, forcing everyone into a karaoke contest. Hiyoko danced, even though she was not really good at it, and Mahiru took a lot of pictures of everyone. ‘They are for Leader’ she said when they asked her why she was doing an entire photo shoot. By the end of the day, Rantaro was completely worn down and had a headache, but he was filled with happiness.

When they were all going back to their own apartments or houses, Ibuki gave him a piece of paper with a phone number.

“Kaede’s number! I’m a genius, right?!” she complimented herself with a laugh. “By the way, she has an apartment here too. I don’t know if she is gonna live here though. She went to her parents’ house, so maybe she is staying there.” she waved at him before disappearing down the hallway with a hop in her steps.

Rantaro sat on his new sofa and played around with the paper while waiting for Danganronpa to start. He was not sure whatever he should call her or not. Maybe she wanted to forget everything and live a peaceful life with her parents… He decided to wait for a bit and set the paper aside focusing entirely on the TV screen. That day, the program was clearly buying time by showing other people’s perspective during the exploration of the school and then more of the flashback light. They showed a map of the school and spent a fair amount of time discussing the new Labs. Nagito was the heart of the show, he was commenting on all of the potential murder weapons, all potential locations, everything. The audience was eating every single word he was saying. Rantaro was taking notes on how to keep the audience’s attention and energy high. He was still unsure what would be a good way to make the show less popular, so he was taking notes of all the potentially useful details. The last scenes of the episode showed Kokichi trying to enter Maki’s Lab during the night, but then changing his mind. Rantaro was curious what that was all about.

The next day he was momentarily disoriented, waking up in an unfamiliar ambient was always like that. He was not alone for long though, the others had apparently decided to make sure he was never left alone for long and Rantaro was grateful for that. In his memory, he was always surrounded by many people. He didn’t like solitude all that much. After lunch, Sonia finally decided to break the unspoken agreement to not talk about Danganronpa.
“I’ve heard from Fuyuhiko… You want to take part in the show, right?” they were alone in Rantaro’s small kitchen. “I agree. Not all of us does, but I do. The Danganronpa’s staff has been informed about you being discharged from the hospital, so I don’t doubt that you’ll meet them soon. They are probably coming sometime today or tomorrow. But before that… there are some people that I want you to meet. Will you come with me?”

Rantaro smiled and nodded at her firmly and she nodded in return. During the taxi ride Rantaro expressed one of his thought.

“Have you seen yesterday’s show?” he continued after she nodded. “I think they were stalling for time, weren’t they?”

“Yes, as I told you the time is distorted. They need to fill the holes somehow. This is the reason why we were getting a new ‘test’ almost immediately after a murder. They are doing it this time too. The time limit that was given after the First Blood Perk? The audience gets bored if they don’t get at least a murder in two weeks.” she frowned.

“Can’t we use that to our advantage? Try to keep the audience entertained without a murder?” he asked.

“That’s what Nagito is doing. The audience loves him so he is buying us as much time as he can. Unfortunately, he doesn’t have a say in the motives or the next plot points that are used. Byakuya is working on that. He will tell you more in person.”

They got off in front of a large assembly of buildings of various shape, some were short and large, some tall and small, some had many floors, and others were all on one floor. Sonia pointed one that was very large, but not very tall and told him that it was the studio where Danganronpa was broadcasted to the outside world. She then made her way to a high gate; from there a barbered wire wall was surrounding the whole area. She showed the guard something and returned with a small identification card for visitors that he had to wear around his neck. She was clearly well known as everyone let her through after only a glance.

The inside of the building she led him to had a very professional, technological and serious vibe. It was like a large headquarter for some big corporation. She led him to an elevator and they rode it to the fifth floor. Once they were out Sonia noticed that Rantaro was a bit tired and showed him to a small waiting room, she went ahead alone. Rantaro rested, feeling a bit ashamed of himself, even though he knew it was not his fault. After a while, Sonia returned with two familiar faces. Rantaro got on his feet immediately with his mouth opening into a big smile.

“Chiaki! Byakuya!”

Chiaki smiled sweetly, she was still wearing her little kitty hood. Byakuya was less fat than the last time he saw him but he was still wearing the white suit and his confident smirk.

“You look good. Better than Nagito when he got out at least…” he greeted him.

“Rantaro, I’m very glad to see you again.” she said with her soft, sweet voice. “I’m sorry that couldn’t visit you, truly.” she bowed her head a little.

Rantaro’s heart squeezed from too many emotions. God, he had messed them both, well maybe Byakuya not as much, but it wasn’t his fault that he died so early.

“Chiaki,” intervened Sonia, “Is your boyfriend not here?”

Chiaki shook her head.
“No, he was urgently called up to the top floor. A murder is being consumed right this moment and as storywriter, he is needed. To arrange the details of the trial and what proof to give them and all that.”

“A murder? Right now?!” Rantaro paled. “Who is being killed, who killed?!”

“I dunno.” she shook her head again. “Only the admins of Neo World Program have access to live information.”

“But… Leader…” Sonia looked distressed.

“Don’t worry.” Byakuya intervened. “Kokichi is safe and sound in his room. He collapsed after the Insect Meet and Greet.”

“The… what?” Rantaro was perplexed.

“Ah, right. This had not been shown on TV yet.” he pointed down the hallway. “Come inside, you have to meet our contact.”

The room Byakuya led them was completely dark except for a multitude of monitors on the far back wall. The back of a silhouette was visible in the glow. It was a small, skinny, short guy with blond hair and black bags under his eyes. He turned toward them for a moment.

“I’m Mitarai Ryota. The Admin of the Neo World Program responsible for editing the scenario. Nice to see you again, Survivor.” he bowed just a little with an uncertain expression.

Rantaro stared at him for a moment before finally remember.

“You are that guy! The one that made me film the video for my Survivor Perk!”

“Right.” he nodded. “That was me. I’m responsible for moving, adding and editing all the objects inside the program. Your video was part of my contract.”

“He is our contact. He is the one that let us see the footage in advance.” explained Byakuya. “I’m basically here all day, I work as a messenger between the story writers' department and him. It’s a small task, but it’s the only one I can do. I can be useful though, I can make sure to agree on details to change in secret with Chiaki’s boyfriend and Ryota. I always try to exclude from these decisions the other writers. I have to lay low and agree only on small changes. Like Kokichi’s Motive Video.”

“Leader’s Motive Video…?” Rantaro was not sure he understood.

“Yes, for this season they decided to give parts of memory during the course of the whole season. The flashback lights? I’m not responsible for them, I only place the treasure chests and the lights themselves. The content is beyond me.” explained Ryota. “The Motive Videos are a part of that. Basically, they are gaining some fake memories about a loved one in danger so they are more prone to kill. I made sure to modify a little his video so he was not affected by the new memory. For him, the video was simply nonsense. I cannot modify the other flashback lights, however. The writers would notice if no one remembered the things they want them to.”

“Kokichi is a variable out of control, so they weren’t surprised when he did nothing.” concluded Byakuya.

“A variable out of control…?” there were so many things that Rantaro didn’t know.

“Yeah, that’s…” Byakuya was interrupted by a sound coming from the monitors.
“You have to go, I need to focus. I have to place the evidence for the murder.” Ryota said urgently.

“Wait, at least tell us what happened!” Sonia pleaded.

“I don’t know myself, this was my break time, I have no control over the program during breaks, they don’t want too many people to touch stuff at the same time. Remember the incoherency of some of the things that happened during your season? Too many people working at once. You have to go now!”

Byakuya and Chiaki made them leave the room and shut the door.

“I’m sorry, Ryota’s job is very delicate, but I’m positive that Leader was not involved at all.” Chiaki tried to comfort them. “We will show you the whole murder sequence tomorrow.”

Byakuya and Chiaki left to meet with the storywriters, so Sonia and Rantaro had no other choice but to leave for the day.

“They are very busy, we will come back tomorrow, don’t worry.” Sonia tried to look confident.

“It’s okay, I can see that they are in a delicate position. I have understood Ryota’s job and Byakuya’s position but what about Chiaki? How have they reached these positions?” he asked.

“Ryota was working for Danganronpa since way before all this, this is his fourth year in the programming. He and Chiaki’s boyfriend were the ones that started this secret operation and we decided to help. I don’t know the details that well, but apparently the season where Nagito and Byakuya first met had some serious trouble. I think one of the participants actually died, some girl called Ikusaba Mukuro. Chiaki’s boyfriend was one of the three winners of the 51st season. Chiaki got into this world following him. She once told me that she chose to become the next mastermind to assure that Nagito and Byakuya were kept in a safe environment. Now she is just working as an assistant for him, and the audience still loves her so she sometimes appears on the show as well. And well, Byakuya bossed everyone around until they gave him the position.”

Rantaro was lost in too many thoughts for the whole trip home, he wished goodnight to Sonia and switched on the TV. Danganronpa that night was completely focused on a ‘big reveal’. To gain some more time they made a special about Maki’s true talent. They showed her Lab. The Ultimate Assassin’s Lab. The audience was completely unaware that another murder had already happened. Rantaro did not pay much attention to the girl’s talent, it was all fake anyway. He instead realized that whoever died was now awake in the hospital. He decided to try and visit the following day.

They ended the night by showing every participant’s morning; Kokichi was spending time with the Inventor, Miu. Rantaro could almost see the gear turning in his head. He smiled fondly at the scene. Kokichi’s mind was never resting.

He slept badly that night. Many faces and voices kept appearing and disappearing in his mind. He slept through his alarm and was then woken up by the doorbell ringing. When he opened the door, still in his pajamas, was greeted by an unfamiliar face.

“Good morning, Amami Rantaro. I’m from Danganronpa. We have a proposal for you.”

Chapter End Notes
Next time on Present Side:
Kokichi lures everyone inside Miu's trap.

Finally, we see again Byakuya and Chiaki!
For anyone who is confused by him, there is no 'Ultimate Impostor', the one you see here is the only Byakuya Togami, with the physical appearance of the Impostor and his personality. I have basically given the real title to the Impostor because I like him and I'm sad that he is so ignored by everyone. So I guess you can say that DR1 Byakuya doesn't exist, or you can consider them the same person, I don't mind either way.
Another character I like: Ryota Mitarai.
He is not the Ultimate Animator, he is not an Ultimate at all, but he fits perfectly the image of the programmer that I wanted for this story.
And Mukuro Ikusaba... I don't like her a lot but I wanted to give her a spot, even if it's pretty small, since she is basically ignored in her game.
You can already take for granted that I'll mention a ton of characters with the exception of the DR1 cast. Putting the DR1 killing game in this would make everything too complex and I really don't want. If you are curious about the 51st season don't worry, someday you'll get answers.
Kokichi reached the computer room a bit out of breath.

Inside he saw a row of chairs with some helmets placed on it. Gonta greeted him with a smile and told him that he had to gather another row of chairs. Kokichi decided to follow him outside the room. He didn’t want to spend more time in there than strictly necessary. The chairs that they were using were coming from the little resting area near the dining room. Kokichi could not help but remember all the times he had met or played a game with Saihara-chan there. He did not want to remember those things.

Gonta carried two chairs at once while Kokichi struggled to carry one. It was too heavy for his weak arms. Gonta noticed that he was not following him and stopped to ask him if he was okay. Kokichi was reaching his limit of gentleness he was willing to accept, so he tried to send him ahead. Surprisingly Gonta did indeed go ahead without him and Kokichi placed the chair down panting. Before he could try carrying it again, Gonta reappeared empty handed and picked up his chair without a word.

“I… I can do that on my own!” he protested, hurt in his pride.

“How do you know that I'm really doing something good here?” he asked with a hint of dangerousness in his voice. He was baiting him into say some stupid thing about trust. “I’m a liar, you know?”

Gonta stared at him without saying anything for a while then smiled again.

“Gonta not intelligent. Gonta can’t understand what is a lie and what not.” he was serious. “But Gonta has a good sixth sense. Gonta knows that Kokichi is trying to save friends. Gonta can see it in Kokichi’s eyes. Kokichi is Gonta’s friend. Gonta want to help friends with his life. Gonta will do anything Kokichi ask.”

Then the big Entomologist turned his back at him and started to make his way up the stairs.

“You really are stupid, aren’t you?” he whispered.

The computer room was all set up after lunch. Iruma-chan sent them away telling them that she wanted to eat. Kokichi knew that she actually wanted to tamper with the program a bit more to lay her trap. Kokichi didn’t know exactly what she was scheming, but he was pretty confident in his ability to be a flexible thinker. And even if he were to die, it wasn’t like he was actually going to die.

Kokichi and Gonta also went to eat, then Kokichi sent Gonta to help Iruma-chan gather everyone. He ran to the computer room and tried to understand what she was doing. The only things he managed to see were two maps and a special setting on himself, he would be paralyzed on the spot had he touched her. That settled it. Kokichi could not kill her even if he wanted. Gonta had to do it.
Still, Kokichi was going to offer him a choice. After all, he was the only one who knew that death was not permanent. He was the only one that could actually risk his life recklessly. If Gonta wanted to back out, he would let him. Unfortunately, considering the little speech he gave earlier that choice was already evident.

The sun had already set when everyone was finally gathered inside the room. Iruma-chan, laughing obnoxiously as always, attempted to explain the virtual world with little success. The girl was intentionally leaving some important things out, like the fact that you could die inside that world. Kokichi could see that the others were not convinced to enter at all. He had to take the situation into his hands once again.

“This program was left here by Monokuma, right? So maybe he left something inside for us? Like, an incentive?” he suggested waiting for the beat to drop from the ceiling as usual.

“Oh!” there he was. “I’ve placed a flashback light inside the virtual world!”

“A flashback light? Inside the virtual world?” Shirogane-chan was sweating from nervousness.

“Yes!” the bear was cheerful as always. “There is a memory of the outside world inside! Don’t you want to know more about the world that you want to return to so badly?”

It was Momota-chan who influenced everyone’s decision by saying that he was going. Kokichi knew that he wanted to go to forget his illness for a while. He didn’t know what kind of illness it was, but he was getting pale every day a little more, clearly, it was not going well. His killer girlfriend immediately sided with him and Saihara-chan, the favorite son of the couple, followed suit. After Gonta and Kiibo agreed too, only Yumeno-chan and Shirogane-chan were left. The two girls obviously didn’t want to stay behind alone, so they agreed as well.

They all sat on the chairs, Kokichi chose the one next to Saihara-chan, as far away as possible from both Iruma-chan and Gonta. The Inventor started to explain how to properly connect the cord to the helmets and then they all logged in. They ended up inside a salon, the graphics and his own body were so lacking that he felt completely out of place. His body still moved at his commands, but the movements themselves were limited, more difficult. He stared at the others’ avatars; they were round and funny, with stupid expressions on their faces. None of it had even a hint of realism. This was far from the original Neo World Program.

Once they were all inside, Kokichi punched Kiibo and confirmed his suspicions about the nerves being connected to their real bodies even there. Their \textit{real bodies} in the \textit{real world}, not the ones that were seated in the computer room, those were still avatars. Harukawa-chan asked Iruma-chan some explanations about the program, after all she never said that they would feel pain in the virtual world. Unfortunately, none of them realized that the pain was not the only thing that was sent back to their usual avatar bodies. Iruma-chan explained that laws of physic still worked the same in there except for the fact that objects could not break. Then she showed them two maps. One of the mansion they were in and one of the outside area. The map of the mansion showed a kitchen, a dining room, the salon, a bathroom and a roof. Outside, a river was cutting the map in half; it was flowing down a mountain and connecting with another part of the river that was delineating the bottom side of the world. Besides the mansion, there was a chapel too, on the other side of the river. Only a bridge was connecting the two sides. The girl explained that beyond the map limits was an invisible wall all around the perimeter. Basically, they were trapped in a square piece of land. In the middle of the map, near the river, was a strange white line that she refused to explain.

Kokichi, who already knew where the flashback light was hidden, signaled Gonta to follow him and told everyone that he was taking a look around. Gonta reassured them that he would keep an eye on him and followed him out of the mansion behind the building, into the snowing fields. There Kokichi
showed him the flashback light and told him to check it first, to make sure it was not a trap. The big
guy, always eager to help, switched the light on without much hesitation. After only a couple of
seconds, he has kneeled on the ground with his head in his hands. Kokichi felt bad for him, he
honestly did, this lie was so painfully different from all the others that he was normally spinning
around, but there was no other choice. Not if he wanted to do this. They would all learn the ‘truth’
sooner or later anyway. Monokuma surely was planning to reveal it in a flashy way. Kokichi was
going to steal the opportunity from him. He saw everyone else leaving the mansion to reach the
chapel and he told Gonta that they could talk about it later, right now he needed to keep a straight
face in front of them and not tell them about the flashback light. Gonta, trusting as he was, nodded
sadly, his expression devoid of the usual brightness even in this avatar form.

They made their way to the river to join the others. The bridge that was supposed to be there was
only half built and the other half was missing. Iruma-chan asked Saihara-chan to fetch a signboard to
put in place of the bridge. This was so obviously suspicious that Kokichi immediately understood
that it was somehow connected to her murder scheme. He already knew that there was a trick to the
maps, that they had been modified. She probably had some way to get to places that were not
supposed to be accessible or something like that. She finally explained the white line, it was a
loading point. The world was literally cut in half, it was impossible to hear or see past the line.

Once they reached the chapel, the inside appeared to be a mess of objects stacked casually one on
top of the other. The Inventor swiftly took the situation in her hands once again and decided to divide
them all into small groups to explore and find the flashback light. She assigned herself in the chapel,
Momota-chan in the roof of the mansion and Kokichi in the salon. Then she just told the others to
decide for themselves. Kokichi was really impressed by her stupidity. She couldn’t be more clear
about her crime. She assigned herself, her target, and the person she wanted to put the blame on and
yet no one else. No one was going to question why? Nope.

“Hey, you.” she whispered to him. “You have to meet me at the roof later, we still have some things
to clarify, you and I.”

That was her plan? To invite him to the murder scene? What would she do if he just decided not to
go? What a stupid girl. Kokichi had no reason not to fall into her trap. He agreed without even
asking how she was going to make Momota-chan disappear from the roof. He would figure out later
how she would make him log out forcefully. On the other hand, this gave him a better understanding
of her plan. She was going to fake the murder so it would seem like it was consumed in the real
world and Momota-chan would be the only one that logged out. Nice idea, but only if no one was
going to distrust her words about the virtual world rules. He had a feeling that Saihara-chan would
not accept condemning his best friend without even trying to look into things. She really was a stupid
girl.

Kokichi made sure that Gonta would be assigned to the mansion with him and he appointed him to
the rooftop. Saihara-chan was going to search the kitchen, Shirogane-chan the dining room,
Harukawa-chan, Yumeno-chan and Kiibo the chapel. Separating again, they went to the other side
of the river, but once they were past the loading point the Inventor appeared again.

She picked up the sign used as bridge and dropped it into the water.

“Oh, my hands slipped!”

Chapter End Notes
Next time Somewhere:
Rantaro starts a long an painful fight against a colossal brand and he met someone that just woke up.

I have a survey question for you today!
I'm getting close to writing the end so soon I'll have the exact number of chapters this story will have...
My question is: would you like me to put it in the description or would you rather not have the length spoiled?
If the total number scare you I won't reveal it :'}
Rantaro was seated at his kitchen table, in front of him the Danganronpa’s representative.

He was sipping his tea with a friendly expression, but Rantaro didn’t feel relaxed at all. The man had already spent more than an hour explaining a lot of complicated stuff like legal implications, monthly fees and other things. He was trying to convince him to participate in the show as much as possible using money and popularity as bait. Rantaro didn’t need much convincing though.

“I agree to participate in the show, but I want to decide when, is that acceptable?” he negotiated.

“Of course, that is acceptable!” the man smiled brightly. “People love you, so we want you to be our guest as much as possible, but it would not be good to force you, right?” he laughed without real amusement, it was just a performance, a façade to look more agreeable.

Rantaro wanted to know more about the murder that was just consumed, so he told the man that he would participate the day after, not that same day. The man nodded and started to give him the details of his eventual participation, from the time he was supposed to show up in the studio, to the clothing department he was supposed to visit. When the man finally left, Kazuichi barged in with a worried expression. Rantaro was moved by the affection his friends were showing him, but he reminded him that he was capable of taking care of himself. Later in the day, they were all reunited inside Ryota’s office to watch the murder unfold. Byakuya and Chiaki were not present. Ryota told them that the storywriting department was currently in a big meeting about what to use as the next motive. Rantaro asked if the trial was already finished, but Ryota shook his head.

“No, in a couple hours they will discover the body.” he answered.

“But then why they are assuming that this murder will be solved?” Rantaro insisted.

“Why do you think the mastermind is inside? To ensure that the trial will not derail too much.” Ryota frowned. “The audience would hate a season that ends in the second trial… And we are using the prize system to give Saihara-san an irrefutable evidence.”

“Prize system?” Rantaro was still overwhelmed by the amount of information that he wasn’t aware of.

“The pool. The popularity pool. The winner of an entire week gets a prize of our choosing. Since the winner last week was Saihara-san we are giving him a piece of evidence.”

They watched the video. It was not precisely edited yet, so Ryota was efficiently switching from camera angle to camera angle to get them a full picture of the events. Everything started with the Motive Videos, Ryota showed them both Kirumi’s and Kokichi’s. Rantaro, who had spoken with Kokichi about his past, could see that it was all a trap. DICE was not real. Thanks to Byakuya’s and Ryota’s meddling Kokichi was not affected by it the way Kirumi was. She clearly entered a state of panic, then she hid her Video in her dress. Ryota transformed the rest of the day in a fast forward. They saw Kokichi and Gonta planning the Inset Meet and Greet, and then they saw him sneak into the others’ rooms and steal the Motive Videos. Kirumi’s was still in her dress so he could not find it. Once back in Gonta’s Lab, Kokichi was overwhelmed by Tenko and the Videos were redistributed back by Monokuma. They all sighed loudly at Kokichi’s defeat.
Then Ryota switched perspective and showed Kirumi killing Ryoma in his own shower room by drowning him in his sink. Her plan was borderline crazy and borderline genius, Rantaro had never seen a ropeway like that. Ryota clarified that her plan actually failed, as had she fell into the water after losing balance. But the production edited the whole process and erased that from her mind. The body was actually placed in the water tank by Shirogane. Kirumi had her memory modified to fit the storywriters’ image. Rantaro was impressed by how sneaky the production was. How many murders were actually their doing? Then he realized.

“My murder!” he yelled. “Shirogane was responsible for that too!”

“Yes,” Ryota nodded. “Since the time stretches we had half an hour to act after we saw that the shotput ball had not hit you. Shirogane decided to act herself.” he sent him an apologetic look.

“My murder was like that too.” intervened Nekomaru. “Gundham is a genius but he didn’t calculate that the gravity would not be enough to kill a metallic body.” he nodded at Gundham with a smile and he nodded in return. Rantaro was impressed by how they had coped with this whole thing, as if it was a cool story to tell to your children. “So the production made the pillar collide with my head. It was not a logical thing but it was the only solution they could think of.”

“So… the Maid ah?” Fuyuhiko sighed. “Her Motive Video is complete bullshit.”

“Yes, it was Chiaki’s boyfriend’s and Nagito’s idea.” explained Ryota. “They did it on purpose. It’s so stupid that it’s going to leave the audience dissatisfied. Nagito has already prepared an entire speech to ridicule this whole murder.”

Rantaro was a bit worried, was he capable of playing at the same mental level that Nagito was setting? Was he capable of helping? That night they all gathered in Rantaro’s living room to watch Danganronpa. They observed Kokichi talking to Kirumi, he asked her how far was she willing to go. Rantaro was impressed; Kokichi had already figured out on his own that Kirumi was a potential danger. He really should stop underestimating him. Then Kokichi made pictures of them and arranged them in a particular order. All the people that were still alive were under the category ‘suspects’. Was Kokichi searching for the mastermind? Rantaro wished he could send a telepathic message to him and tell him about Shirogane. Nagito didn’t mention Kirumi’s crime at all, but it wasn’t surprising. Even the representative that had contacted Rantaro had told him that he could not reveal any information that he may receive in private to the audience. Nagito would be forbidden to enter the studio if he was to reveal a spoiler.

The following morning Rantaro woke earlier, after a good night of sleep without any nightmares, he started to mentally prepare for his first appearance on the live show. He was about to eat a late breakfast when the doorbell rang once again. Rantaro opened the door expecting someone from Danganronpa or one of his friends but instead, it was Kaede.

“Hi, I’m bothering you?” she asked with an awkward smile.

“Not at all! I’m surprised to see you!” he let her in and they sat on the sofa.

“I had to calm down, after meeting with her…” the disgust in her voice was evident. “So I decided to meet my real family… It’s not actually that different from the one I remember. Except that this one… looks at me differently. I don’t know how to explain it…. It’s like, they encouraged me to participate in Danganronpa and they were ecstatic about it. They had even bought a piano to accommodate my new persona…” she clutched her skirt in her hands. “They love me and I love them but… It’s painful. They see me as a better version of my older self. I don’t even remember my older self. Looking at old pictures of me was… odd. It seems like a was on the volleyball team before all this. I don’t even know how to play volleyball now. This is all so confusing…” she hung her head.
Rantaro had the impulse to rest a hand on her shoulder to comfort her, but they were not that close, so he refrained. Then Kaede asked him about more information about everything. They talked for a long time about Ryota, Nagito and the show. Rantaro became aware of her fighting spirit, which was growing stronger by the minute. In the end, she made that familiar gesture raising her fists with determination.

“I wanna help.” she said. “I wanna help Shuichi, you, Kaito, Kokichi and everyone else! I’ll do whatever I can to help!”

“Then, there is something that we can do before I have to go to the studio. We can meet with Ryoma. Kirumi is still ‘alive’ inside the Neo World Program so we have to wait to talk to her, but I’m sure that Ryoma will want to see some familiar faces!”

Kaede nodded cheerfully and then took a tea with him, who had still not had breakfast. During the trip to the hospital, he asked her if he could register her number on his phone and they exchanged numbers. Inside the hospital, they were easily directed to Ryoma’s room and they knocked with a bit of nervousness. The deep voice of the short guy invited them in. He was seated on the visitor’s chair and was chewing on a blue lollipop. As soon as he saw them his face opened in a smile neither of them had ever seen.

“Oh! Look who is here! Nice to see you two again!” he greeted them.

“You… look happy.” Rantaro commented before he could stop himself. Kaede kicked him discretely. “I mean, I glad that you are in such high spirit!”

“Why would I not be? All the bad things that I thought were real are actually fake, I have a family and all is well.” he shrugged.

That made Rantaro wonder, he was not sure it was a good thing to bring this up but he needed information.

“Did you asked them to make up your tragic backstory?”

“No, not really. I only asked to be a champion at something, the rest was all their doing.” he frowned a little. “My family told me all about it. The visited me since I’m not allowed to show my face outside the hospital until they show my death on TV. They told me that they were really surprised when the staff just decided to completely make up my backstory. So, they hurried here to show me that it was all fake. I’m very glad.”

Yet another victim of Danganronpa’s meddling. Rantaro and Kaede explained all to him, once again, and the small guy was quite shocked.

“Kokichi was on another season with you? Incredible… well, maybe not that much. I could sense something in him. He was sharper and more adapt to that situation than any of us. And Shirogane is the mastermind, hmm? So, you want my help, correct?” they nodded. The small guy took a moment of silence and then spoke in a neutral voice. “I want to make them feel bad for what they made me go through… but I don’t really care about the rest. I’m going to accept an interview for you. Then I just want to go back home. But I want to talk to Kirumi first.”

Rantaro was a bit disappointed, but he agreed to his terms. He left Kaede with him and went to the Danganronpa’s studio. They made him wear a shirt that resembled the one that he was wearing inside the Neo World Program and cream pants. He was almost back to his old self. He sat in one of the couches that were prepared for the guests of honor waiting for the show to start, Nagito and Shirogane were nowhere to be seen. He fidgeted a little when the audience started to sit down on the
stands, noticed him and started gossiping loudly. Fashionably late, like the smug guy he was, Nagito entered when the show was about to start, he raised an eyebrow at him but didn’t say anything. Shirogane entered the scene only after the opening song was finished.

“Good evening, everyone!” she yelled with her arms spread open like always. “Ready to see another beautiful Danganronpa show!” the audience cheered loudly. “Tonight we have two honored guests! A round of applause for Komaeda Nagito please!” the audience applauded him like every night and he nodded in their direction as always. “And now, an even bigger round of applause for you, dear Amami Rantaro!” the audience exploded in a loud cheer for him. Rantaro could not decide if he felt flattered or not. “Finally, our beloved Survivor is here for us!” she sat in her special chair. “So, tell us, how do you feel being here in the flesh for the first time?”

“Good evening,” he greeted the audience, which then applauded a little. “I’m sorry that it took me so long to come here and see you all, I could not wait to be part of this amazing show!” he wanted to take part in the show as much as possible, so this lie was necessary, just like Kokichi’s lies were.

“I see, I see! We are glad to have you! Can I start with a difficult question?” her question was purely rhetorical and they both knew. “How do you feel about Kaede? She killed you, yes?” Rantaro was impressed by her ability to be so shameless. She knew that he knew. They had looked into each other’s eyes for a second before he died.

“I don’t blame her! Honestly, her plan was pretty good, while a bit risky.” if Nagito could, he could. “I’m pretty surprised that it worked!” Shirogane’s smile was so fake that he wanted to laugh. “She did good. Trying to sniff out the mastermind was the most logical choice. Kaede and I already talked, we are good.”

The audience made sounds of content, while Shirogane nodded cheerfully.

“How nice! So, I can’t really ask you much about the current participants, you have known them only for a couple of days, but there is someone that you know well in there! What do you think about Kokichi so far?”

“Leader is great.” Rantaro considered if what he was about to say would be too risky but he went ahead and said it anyway. “Even with his personality completely twisted from the original he is still great.”

He was expecting a strong reaction to such open accusation; but instead he only got some nods of understanding. Shirogane must have sensed his confusion because she immediately used the situation to change the mood back to her advantage.

“Yeah, the Neo World Program is not very good for long expositions. Did you know that all Survivors had the same problem? They all had a residue of their old memories! Look no further than Byakuya or Nagito, here.” she pointed at him. “Both of them had a better understanding of the situation than all the others. Byakuya sensed the incoming danger and Nagito well... you were there to see. Unfortunately, all Survivors have to be eliminated as soon as possible to avoid situations like the one with Nagito. It’s for their own good, you know?” she smiled.

Rantaro was shocked. He should have seen this coming from miles away. It was true, Nagito at some point started to connect the dots; he started to go completely insane and lose his mind. It was the Neo World Program fault. Too many contradictory memories in his brain. He remembered the feeling of complete dread and mistrust when he saw the message inside his Survivor Perk. He remembered the feeling of disconnect from the others... He remembered feeling completely different from all of them, except maybe Kokichi.
'Oh God, are you telling me… that's Kokichi’s fate? To go completely crazy, like Nagito?'

Seeing that he was not responding anymore, Shirogane spoke for a bit with Nagito about the role of the Survivor. Nagito easily covered for him and kept the flow of the show going, he was a master in this. Then Shirogane started to ask him a lot of trivial questions, like how he liked the participants of Danganronpa 52 and what he thought of the island setting and the plot. They spent the whole night talking about the past and Rantaro was getting tired. In the end, she told him to come back to give his opinion on the new season and Rantaro accepted faking pleasure for the offer.

The episode ended when they showed Shuichi and Kaito train together in the courtyard while Kokichi was playing some games in the casino. Shirogane disappeared shortly after the end and soon Rantaro was left alone with Nagito.

“‘You should have told me that you were coming.’ he said to him. “You have still a lot to learn.”

“Is it true?” Rantaro interrupted him. “Leader is going to suffer from this?”

“The psychological pressure in discovering that your whole life is a lie is something that I don’t wish for anyone. When you discover it outside, surrounded by family and friends is one thing. When you discover it inside a virtual world surrounded by strangers that means nothing to you… It’s another. I just wanted to end that farce in the most dramatic and impactful way. Is it such a bad thing?” Nagito smile was really ominous.

Nagito had not forgotten or forgiven anything, Rantaro realized. He was only very good at hiding it. He could feel that the guy in front of him wanted revenge, he wanted to provoke pain to the Danganronpa brand and its audience. Would Kokichi end up in the same state?

‘I need to bring him back as soon as possible!’

Chapter End Notes

Next time on Present Side:
8 partecipants left.

Ryoma's real name is Eiichiro Yamada. Eiichiro is the main character from Baby Steps, a tennis anime/manga ;)
I couldn't find a good place to add it into the chapter so I'll write it here.

So... the distortion of time is used to modify the murders as they please... Remember this information, it may be useful later down the line. Kokichi not finding the black piece of fabric now make sense, same with why Kaito said it was only trash when it was clearly important. Remember in the game Shuichi said that he didn't know what that was but it was bothering his Detective intuition? The prize was for him, they made sure only him would see it or be interested in collecting it.

Today I have a little homework for you!
I want you to take a closer look at all the names I'm using during the narration and the dialogues in Rantaro's POV.
When we'll meet Chiaki's boyfriend the set will be mostly complete. I want you to take notes about how Rantaro sees everyone and how Ryota address to people. I put a certain effort in making the relationships with people evident based on that detail.
I'll explain it all later, but let's see if you can reach the same conclusion.
“Oops, my hands slipped!”

Iruma-chan’s act was so transparent that even the others realized that she had done it on purpose. However, only Kokichi understood the real implications. The girl was giving herself an alibi, just in case they would figure out that he had died inside the virtual world. She had been really adamant about the fact that only this bridge was connecting the two sides of the map. With the sign gone, she should not be able to reach the mansion. She had really planned this thoroughly, except that she was ruining her plan by acting like an idiot.

They reached the mansion and started to split up to go to their respective areas. Kokichi waited in the salon for only a minute before going to the rooftop to meet with Gonta. Momota-chan was not there as he expected. The big guy arrived moments later, he looked really dejected.

“Gonta is so confused… Gonta doesn’t know what to do…”

“This is really terrible isn’t it?” he started to spread his lies, feeling dirtier than he ever felt in his whole life. “There is no outside world to return to… Even if we escape through that tunnel… We can’t escape the extinction of the human race.” he tried to sound genuinely upset. “What do you think we should do, Gonta?”

It was a psychological strategy. The Entomologist was not capable of taking a decision right now and making him realize that would help him put all his faith in someone else’s decision. Basically, it was a way to discharge the responsibility.

“Gonta not smart, Gonta doesn’t know… Gonta can only use muscles… Does Kokichi have an idea?” he asked, just as expected.

“What have Akamatsu-chan, Amami-chan, Hoshi-chan, Toujo-chan, Yonaga-chan and Chabashira-chan died for? Toujo-chan’s citizens are already dead… The two girls died hoping to give Yumeno-chan a future… Amami-chan and Akamatsu-chan died to help us escape…” he pulled out some things partially false just to make a bigger impact. “This is such a big despair… All we fought for was meaningless…”

Gonta started to cry silently.

“I don’t think that we should allow the others to discover this, don’t you agree? We need to stop them. We can’t let them discover any of this. They will probably lose any will to live. You don’t want that, do you?” he stared into his eyes until he nodded. “Then… maybe it’s best if they die ignorant… But you have to choose, okay? I won’t tell you what it’s best, think about it with your own heart.”

Gonta’s eyes widened, Kokichi spotted Iruma-chan entering the mansion.

“What Kokichi mean?!” Gonta asked, scared.

“Quick hide!” he interrupted him. “Iruma-chan is coming!”
Gonta frantically searched for a hiding place and took cover behind the corner of the rooftop entrance. Kokichi had already planted a certain item there. The door opened and Iruma-chan appeared, she had a hammer in her hand. The two of them stared at each other for a moment.

“Is this a booty call?” he teased her. “Or are you here to kill me?”

“So, you have already it figured out…” she hesitated for a second. Kokichi saw Gonta peeking out of the corner with wide eyes. “There is no use trying to resist, I made sure you could not do anything to me! I have to escape… I have to escape no matter what, the world needs my genius!” she raised the hammer. “You are in my way. You can easily expose me in a class trial… you have to die, so, sorry, but die!”

Before the girl could actually hit him Gonta jumped out of the corner and wrapped the toilet paper, that Kokichi planted there on purpose, around her neck. The avatars’ strength was equal, but thanks to the toilet paper Gonta had a significant advantage. Kokichi was almost expecting him to stop strangling her after she dropped the hammer but he actually ended the job. Kokichi, until the very end, was not expecting this to work. Maybe somewhere, deep in his heart, he was hoping that Gonta would be selfish and not save him. Or that he would find a different solution. He was still prepared to die. Seeing his prediction come true did not give him any pride, only disappointment, disgust and self-loathing. He wanted to be the one that died.

“This is what Kokichi wanted, right?” Gonta asked, kneeled on the ground, not looking away from reality, as Kokichi would have expected.

“Why…!” for a moment the hurt in his voice slipped out of his mask. “Why have you decided for this solution? You could have stop…” he didn’t know himself what he was trying to do by asking.

“Gonta not smart, but Gonta understood. Friends want to escape at every cost. Gonta can’t let this happen. Gonta will sacrifice self for friends. Will Kokichi help Gonta?” he pleaded him.

Kokichi was once again possessed by the desire to hurt, to slap, to punch. Because stupid foolish Gonta, why could he not realize that he didn’t choose this? Kokichi forced him into thinking this way. Why was he asking him for help? Kokichi was just going to use all of this to make the others miserable, Gonta was scarifying himself to make the situation worse. Kokichi was going to rot in hell forever for this. And he deserved every second of it.

Kokichi helped Gonta gather all the stuff that Iruma-chan had on her, the hammer and a cell phone, which was probably used to log Momota-chan out. Then he placed her avatar body on a piece of lattice that was on the roof and sled her down the snow that was on the roof. Her body and all the objects disappeared beyond the wall. Kokichi understood the real disposition of the world at that moment. The only thing left was the toilet paper. Kokichi had not actually decided to use the toilet paper to humiliate her, even if it kinda did, but because it was the only object that he found that was resembled a rope. In this world, objects didn’t break after all.

Sensing the time running out, he told Gonta how to return to the ground using the toilet paper after locking the door behind him. Kokichi tried to return to the salon but Saihara-chan and Shirogane-chan ran out of the door passing in front of him without noticing. He took his time reunite with them at the river, where all of them were gathered. Harukawa-chan, Yumeno-chan and Kiibo were in a hurry to return to the ‘real world’ and check on Iruma-chan. Her avatar was frozen and she was not responding. He told Saihara-chan where he could find the sign to use it as a bridge again. He had spotted it while he was waiting for Gonta, from the rooftop. They all ran inside the salon and started to log out one by one. Kokichi and Saihara-chan were left alone last. He had already a plan in mind for this class trial, a real clear objective, more than one actually. So he started immediately by poking Saihara-chan.
“Hey, hey!” he called up to him. “You are really useful, you know that? I’ve changed my mind, why don’t we cooperate? I think that we can make a good team! Together we can save everyone!”

Saihara-chan stared at him for a moment before grabbing the phone receiver to log out.

“Now it’s really not the time, Ouma-kun.” he answered before logging out.

‘No, Saihara-chan. Now it’s the last time.’

He logged out last, already expecting the scene that was unfolding. Just like always, everyone was panicking and fussing over the dead body of Iruma-chan. The fact was funny that this was not her real body either. Not that they knew. The Inventor had died clutching her throat, even in this world she tried to fight. Kokichi noticed that Momota-chan was absent from the room and while he was looking around, he noticed something in the chair he just got up from. He discretely got a little closer and saw a little bottle. Poison. The girl tried to make his death look like someone had poisoned him outside of the virtual world. What a crafty girl.

Monokuma appeared and gave them the Monokuma File N4. Barely anything was written in it, only the time of death. Not even the cause. Monokuma was very crafty too when he wanted to be. Not giving the cause of death made the mystery far more complex. There was the poison there, the possibility of strangulation in the real world and the possibility of death inside the virtual world. The latter was a possibility that only him and Gonta knew. Examining the computer would prove challenging.

When the body discovery announcement finished playing Momota-chan appeared looking panicked. He explained them that he found himself logged out and decided to take a nap in his room. The others found it suspicious, but Kokichi was actually inclined to believe him. His complexion was looking worse and worse and he had bags under his eyes. His illness was proceeding. Now that Kokichi was reminded of it, he understood. There was no way that a true illness was present in the Neo World Program. This was simply another motive. Momota-chan had a time limit before losing the game. It was probably done to add flavor since he had that little flirt with Harukawa-chan going on.

A tragic love story always sells tons.

Chapter End Notes

Next time Somewhere:
Rantaro meets Chiaki's boyfriend and the Necronomicon is an actual thing.

The Present Side chapters will be a bit shorter for some time, I had much more to say in Rantaro's POV than I realized. I needed to buy some more time. I hope you don't hate this pace... I know it's frustrating, I'll make sure to post a longer chapter during the trial so we'll recover some lost time.
The next day Rantaro was in a bad mood.

He had not been all that useful in the show, Nagito was right, he had still a lot to learn. He didn’t want to make another appearance in the studio so soon, so he tried to contact Chiaki for news about what was going on in the Neo World Program. Chiaki told him that the second trial was about to start and they were all very busy. That night in the studio, Shirogane was not present, she could not leave the trial ground until the end. The guy with the blue suit talked all night with Nagito about the Motive Videos, while skipping some of them. Shirogane’s, Korekiyo’s, Ryoma’s, Kirumi’s and Kokichi’s were not shown. Why Shirogane’s was not shown was obvious. What was the point of showing the mastermind’s Motive Video? Korekiyo’s and Kokichi’s had been selected as extras, if they had not revealed only Ryoma’s and Kirumi’s, the audience would have been able to guess the culprit right away. Rantaro had noticed that the production was making sure to not give any details about the murder beforehand, they wanted to let the audience speculate on their own and then follow the discussion actively in the class trial.

The next morning, he was awakened by a call from Chiaki. The girl asked him to meet her in front of Ryota’s office. So after a quick breakfast, he joined his friends and they all arrived at the appointed place. Chiaki greeted them and signaled to keep silent. She led the way up the stairs, looking suspiciously at every corner as she went, and then she stopped in front of a door on the 6th floor. There was a nameplate on the door, it read ‘Hinata Hajime’.

“Oh, I see, we’re visiting your boyfriend.” Kazuichi teased her with a grin on his face.

Chiaki puffed her cheeks, blushing a little.

“Don’t tease me!” she protested. “My boyfriend is a serious person, you better behave!”

“Uh, scary, scary!” he didn’t look scared at all, Rantaro figured that he probably already met her boyfriend before.

She opened the door and inside was a neat, organized office. There was a big window that made the ambiance much livelier than Ryota’s personal space. Seated at the desk was a guy not much older than them, he was wearing a light brown suit like most people in the building. He indeed had a serious face and a very spiky strand of hair made him look even more standoffish. He got on his feet to greet them, but didn't smile, his voice was calm and reserved.

“I’m Hinata Hajime, nice to meet you Amami-kun.” he bowed a little. “It’s good to see you all too, of course. Thank you for always taking care of Chiaki.” she puffed her cheeks once more, looking offended this time. “I would like to have more time to talk with you all, but creating the story for a season is much more work than I thought. Since the second trial is on its way, we have the third part of the season to think about. That’s why you are here.”

“Have you already decided the theme for the third part?” asked Mahiru.

“I strongly pushed the idea this time.” he answered seating back in his seat as everyone was taking a seat in one of the two sofas. “I heard from Chiaki that you, Amami-kun, are interested in helping Ouma-kun, right?” Rantaro nodded. “Due to that reason, I introduced the Necronomicon, as it will
be officially called for the game. Basically, it’s a book which provides the opportunity to have a resurrection ritual.”

“A resurrection ritual?!” Gundham got up and took one of his poses. “What kind of sorcery are you speaking of?! How come I was not invited? As I, Tanaka Gundham, Supreme Overlord of Ice, am the most suited person for this task!”

“I’m aware, Supreme Overlord.” Hinata-san didn’t look surprised at all, maybe he was a more chill guy that he initially thought. “But unfortunately, your existence inside the 53rd season will never be approved by the producers of the show. Only someone that came originally from the season can rejoin it.”

“Wait…” Fuyuhiko intervened. “Are you saying that Rantaro can enter the Neo World Program again? I thought that you couldn’t enter a third time.”

“No, that’s not it. You can’t spend more than a year connected before your body health will start to deteriorate, but Amami-kun was already disconnected and he regained his muscular tone. Now he can be connected for another year if necessary. Of course, this season will end in a couple of months so it’s not necessary at all. I’ve called you here to give me your opinion on the matter. Amami-kun, do you wish to reenter the Neo World Program? If you don’t want to, then I’ll have to ask the other eliminated participants, Akamatsu-san, Hoshi-kun or Toujo-san. If two of you refuse, we will have to rethink our strategy here.”

“I accept. I absolutely want to help Leader!” Rantaro spoke up with confidence.

“Very well, I will manipulate the events as much as I can to make you the revived student.” Hinata-san nodded. “You don’t have anything to worry about, you’ll retain your memories, I will personally make sure of it. I won’t let them tamper with your mind any longer. I promised to stop this madness and to protect all of you. I won’t let anyone else suffer like what Nagito had to go through.”

The last sentence had a particularly heavy tone to it. Rantaro finally connected the dots. Sonia had told him that Chiaki’s boyfriend, Hinata Hajime, was a winner of the previous season, season 51st. Nagito was the second survivor of season 52nd. Nagito and Hinata-san, together with Byakuya participated for the first time during the 51st. They were all friends who fought together, just like him and Kokichi. Hinata-san had to watch his friend, Nagito, become the person that he was now, from the other side of a screen. Just like he was now forced to watch Kokichi.

They had a lot in common.

“Hinata-san, please let me go back.”

Hinata Hajime nodded again, with determination.

That night Rantaro was not lucid enough to take part in the show, instead, he watched Danganronpa from his TV with his friends who were even more affectionate than usual, sensing his mood. They all sighed deeply seeing Kokichi talk with Shuichi in riddles. No matter what memories he had, he was still yards ahead of normal people in term of mental processing. Not that Rantaro was qualified to quantify the intelligence of the Detective, but seeing his confusion was indicator enough. They showed Gonta running around and capturing all the participants that he could find; he even knocked Shuichi unconscious. No one, inside the Neo World Program, noticed that Kokichi hurried immediately by the boy side when he saw that he was unconscious. They were all so focused on their hate to miss the genuine flash of worry on Leader’s face. No one inside Rantaro’s living room missed it.
Leader was still Leader at heart, no matter what.

The next day Rantaro was awoken once again by a call, this time it was Kaede.

“Rantaro? Sorry did I wake you up?” she said. “I’m calling because Ryoma just informed me that Kirumi has awoken. She is being examined and they are going to explain everything to her so she won’t be allowed visitors for a while, but Ryoma asked us to accompany him. He doesn’t want to confront her alone.”

“Okay, okay, sure, I’m coming.”

He jumped out of bed and prepared himself for the day, when he left his apartment he found Kaede waiting for him right outside. He was momentarily distracted by her cute white dress. When she caught him staring, she fidgetted a little with the rim of her skirt, that was right above her knees. They started to descend the stairs together without speaking a word. Rantaro wasn’t sure if an apology was the right thing to say, so they didn’t say anything until they were inside Ryoma’s room. The small guy was too focused on his own problem to notice the strange atmosphere.

They waited outside of her room for about two hours, Ryoma played with his fake cigarette the entire time. When they finally received permission to enter, they almost had to push him into the room. Kirumi stared at them with wide eyes for a moment, as no one probably informed her of their presence, good job really, and then she started to cry and beg for forgiveness. Rantaro had already gone through something similar, but Ryoma looked like a fish on a mountain trip.

“I’m so sorry! I took your life for nothing! I thought I was doing it for the greater good, instead I was just becoming a horrible person! I’m so, so sorry!”

She was in a lot of pain. For someone with a dedication for selfless devotion, the thought of having killed for futile reasons must be unbearable. It took them a long time, but in the end Kaede and Rantaro managed to help her stop crying. At that point, Ryoma finally got closer to her and she stared at him with tears in her eyes.

“You did what you had to. If you must do it again, I would gladly offer my life again. I don’t think that you were in the wrong, no matter what everyone says.” he told her.

Rantaro didn’t really agree with any of this, but it was something that they had to resolve on their own, he was in no place to interfere. Hopefully no one was going to need to do anything like this ever again. The small guy was seated on her bed and once the two of them started talking, Rantaro and Kaede discretely left the room.

“I feel guilty.” she suddenly spoke up. “I should have been there for them. Instead I killed you and abandoned all of them. Especially Shuichi… I can’t watch my trial or what happened right after… It hurts too much.”

“It’s not really something you can take the blame for. You really could not have known any of this.” he tried to reason.

“Are you going to the studio today?” she suddenly changed the subject. “If you are, I’m coming too. I can’t bear to stand by and just watch.”

Rantaro had not decided yet, but now he could not run from it anymore. He had to confront Nagito and everything else sooner or later. They reached the studio together and Rantaro called Nagito with the cell phone number he gave to him. Soon enough he appeared and the three of them went to buy ice cream, away from the Danganronpa staff members.
“The first thing that you have to remember is that the audience cannot think of you as an enemy. If
this happens you won’t be invited anymore. Make sure to be always on their side, at least on the
surface. Next, don’t fish too much for answers from Shirogane. That girl is a hardcore fangirl, she
would do anything for the show, so it’s not going to work. If you are unsure of a comment or
something, put a finger to your lips, I'll intervene. Lastly, the most important thing,” he paused for a
moment. “To win, you have to think like the audience. You should try and think what you would
like to see in this show. Once you know what would make you the happiest... break it. Destroy it.
Make it ugly. Make it stupid. Ruin everything.”

The heaviness in the guy’s voice was enough to make Rantaro feel frozen on the spot. Kaede was
looking around uncomfortably.

“That’s about it. Do your best!” he smiled like everything was normal.

The show seemed to never end for Rantaro, during the first part Shirogane was not present, she was
busy with the last moments post-trial. During that period, the guy in the blue suit gossiped nonstop
about the two of them, trying to make them confess what they were feeling for each other and
whatnot. Apparently, there was a trend of people who killed each other on Danganronpa and then
became best friends in real life. Some had even become married couples. Rantaro was feeling
extremely uncomfortable about all these questions and Kaede looked like she was in a similar
predicament. Nagito didn’t help at all with that.

The second half of the show was presented by Shirogane, and it was not that much better. They
showed Kokichi lock picking the rooms and secretly watching the Motive Videos, they showed
Ryoma’s empty one too. Shirogane tried to bait them into saying something malicious, she asked
them if what Kokichi was doing was correct from their point of view. Rantaro, who already had seen
this scene, was calm and explained that Kokichi was gathering information, but he would soon share
them with the others. Kaede, who had not a set opinion on Kokichi yet, was a bit more flustered and
said that confronting the challenge instead of running away was a good idea. She didn’t sound
confident enough, though, so Shirogane took the opportunity to pester her with questions about what
she would have done if this was her choice to make. Rantaro put his finger on his lip when he could
not endure this torture anymore.

“Well, Shirogane,” Nagito immediately spoke up, “I think that we can agree that without Kokichi,
the show would have reached an impasse. If none of them had seen a Motive Video then nothing
would have happened. What was your plan in case Kokichi had done nothing?”

Rantaro caught onto Nagito’s plan. Not only he was pointing out how much they were relying on
Kokichi to move things along, he was subtly spoiling the future. He said, ‘nothing would have
happened’, he was already setting up the audience to expect a murder soon, he was stealing the
surprise from them. Shirogane had caught on it too.

“Now, now, don’t talk like you are already certain that Kokichi’s plan is going to work! He may fail,
you know?” she smiled amiably.

Smooth recover, no use in denying it. She made a more accurate prophecy than Nagito, making his
spoiler far less relevant than it should have been. The audience would forget his prediction after they
saw Shirogane’s becoming true. It didn’t matter that it would become true in the long run. They
observed Kokichi talking to Ryoma and then losing the videos. Shirogane smiled.

“Well, I guess that even he can fail sometimes! Now we shall see if the killing game will reach an
impasse or not!” she said with confidence.

Nagito’s plan totally backfired, but the guy was still smiling with confidence. Rantaro was still not at
his level, he had no idea why he looked so satisfied. After the show ended he tried to ask him.

“Oh, I’ll show you something interesting, one of these days, if the Necronomicon fails.”

Chapter End Notes

Next time on Present Side:
An unexpected investigation duo takes things seriously, no, not really.

Surprised? I don't think so :')
Back to honorifics... Can you understand why Rantaro calls him Hinata-san?
The answer must be very precise to count ;(
The investigation started.

As always, Momota-chan tried to form an investigation party with Saihara-chan, but this time Kokichi was not going to quietly accept it.

“No way! Saihara-chan is the most reliable here, I can’t let him stay with the primary suspect like this!” he yelled. “It’s Saihara-chan’s time to shine, stop being a leech!”

“Are you trying to say that he would protect me?! Don’t screw around! Shuichi is the type of person to see this kind of thing through! I believe in him!” Momota-chan did his usual gesture with his fists.

“You really love to believe, don’t you?” he mocked him. “This belief can be turned against you, you know?”

“Tsk, whatever!” Momota-chan dismissed him. “If you are gonna get so worked up about this, then I guess I won’t team up with him. C’mon Shuichi! Clear my name with your own logic!” he gave him a thump up.

Kokichi was satisfied with this turn of events. He needed to create a fracture between the two. If his plan was to succeed, he needed them all to scatter and stop having each other’s back. Momota-chan was the most dangerous one. He was the only one that could inspire them all. All the others would become very easy to break once their hero was out of the picture. He needed to be sure that they were too depressed to do anything. Only then the mastermind would become desperate and make a mistake. He needed to take control of the others first and strike later. He would not be satisfied with just defeating the mastermind. Nagito already proved that it was useless. He needed to make this season a complete joke, a mess, a boring misassemble. For this to happen, he needed to have them all exactly where he wanted.

First, he would isolate Saihara-chan and Momota-chan.

“So, let’s see!” he yelled opening his Monokuma File N4. “The time of death is… 30 minutes ago, we were still inside the virtual world by then. I see, I see… Saihara-chan, what do you think about this?”

What Kokichi had not calculated was the feeling that raised in his chest when the Detective chose to look at his Monopad instead of using his own. He stood closer to him to look at the screen without any hint of suspicion toward him. Like it was completely normal for him to trust the liar. Kokichi felt like the monster that he was. But what of Gonta’s pain and sacrifice if he were to confess his crime right now? He needed to stay focused.

“Wow, looks like I’m replacing Momota-chan here! I’m the new assistant!” he was obnoxious as ever. “Hey, hey, Momota-chan! Look how easy it’s for me to replace you!”

“Stop that.” Saihara-chan scolded him but his tone held no hard feelings.

Saihara-chan went to examine the body. Ha stayed behind a bit, not really wanting to get closer to her corpse.
“Eww, what an ugly face! She must have suffered a lot! A fitting death for this vulgar bitch.”

This time Saihara-chan’s stare had some hard feelings in there. Kokichi swallowed the string of vulgarities that he was about to spit. He was supposed to become detestable after this trial, a little restraint would not make much difference at this point.

“I wonder what is the cause of death, it’s not written in the file…” Saihara-chan focused on the body again.

Kiibo told him that the girl was still wearing her helmet when he logged out, but she was already dead. Saihara-chan inspected the helmet, Kokichi already knew that it was useless so he decided to speed things a bit and went to stand in front of Gonta.

“Hey Gonta, I know that this is rare, but I want to hear your opinion! Who do you think the killer is?”

Kokichi was secretly hoping to get this over within the next few moments. There was just no way that the Entomologist was capable to lie so well, he would probably just confess everything right here and there. Kokichi was okay with that. As long as he was capable of splitting up Saihara-chan and Momota-chan and making everyone hate him, it didn’t have to be inside a trial, this room was good enough. However, to his surprise, Gonta actually started to lie, and quite well too. He looked genuinely sad and confused without a hint of guilt anywhere. Kokichi was speechless for a moment. When did he learn to lie so well? His hope for a quick end was shattered.

Saihara-chan proceeded to interrogate everyone. Every time Kokichi tried to throw some mean comment at them, Saihara-chan had just to look in his direction to effectively shut him up. Kokichi was incapable of finding his voice under the Detective’s stare. The weight of his sin crushing his throat. At least he kept a straight face.

After gathering many clues that Kokichi didn’t need, they found the small bottle of poison on his seat. This was the cause of death that Iruma-chan wanted to use to place blame on Momota-chan. Now it looked like a proof of his guilt. Well, it didn’t really matter all that much. After reading the warning on the label, it was clear that this was not the murder weapon. Iruma-chan really was an idiot. This would not have worked even for her. She had underestimated Saihara-chan.

“This is yours, Saihara-chan!” he threw the bottle at him who barely caught it.

“Ouma-kun, don’t throw important clues around please!” he scolded him again. “What do you mean mine?”

“It’s a poison from your Lab!” he smiled.

“Why do you know about it? You really love to be suspicious, don’t you?” Saihara-chan sighed.

“Oh course, I am a Supreme Leader of evil and stuff! Anyway, I have checked everything in this school, nothing can escape my gaze! Why would I not investigate something that screams murder weapon?!?” he yelled.

“All right, all right, you are right, I suppose. Let’s see…” Saihara-chan started to read the label.

“So,” he spoke as soon as the Detective stopped reading, “am I doing a good job? Am I hired? Can I be your partner forever?”

“We will see about that, the important part is during the trial, help me there and I can think about it.” Saihara-chan smiled. Kokichi’s heart almost broke when he realized that Saihara-chan
was joking. He was teasing him playfully. Sure, it was a bit weak, nothing too special, but it was the first time ever that Kokichi saw him joking. After Kaede’s trial he would smile but never too much and he never actually laughed or joked. Kokichi was going to destroy this little progress that he had made. He wanted to die, right there, and a heart attack sounded fitting and very pertinent. “Anyway, why is this on your seat?” and just like that the mood was shattered and Kokichi was reminded of the cold reality of facts.

“Uhh, the Detective is doubting me, I’m so scared!” he faked some tears, he didn’t have to try too hard.

“No, I’m not particularly doubting you, at the very least, I know for a fact that you are too intelligent to just leave this thing here in the open. If you were to commit a crime I’m sure I would need a whole team of Detectives to solve it.”

Another joke. Another freaking joke and a praise. It was clear now, he was trying to kill Kokichi. No doubts about that. It hurt so much.

“Alright,” the Detective spoke again when he saw that Kokichi was not going to answer him, “I guess that this means you have no idea. You should try to be a little nicer, clearly someone here is trying to put the blame on you.”

Kokichi could not remember how his voice worked. He gave up entirely. After that Saihara-chan proposed to take another look inside the virtual world. It suited Kokichi just fine, he needed a bit of time and space for himself anyways. How was he supposed to survive the trial in this state?

“Okay, have fun!” he waved a hand as goodbye.

“You’re not coming?” he was confused. “Why?”

“Nah, I need to make sure that Momota-chan’s girlfriend here doesn’t do anything to you while you are defenseless, she may kill you in your sleep to save her beloved! Don’t worry, with me as your bodyguard, nothing bad will happen!”

“Stop being ridiculous.” Saihara-chan rolled his eyes. “Let’s go, there are still things that I don’t understand.”

“Yeah, have fun!” he repeated.

“You’re really not coming?” he was even more confused now. Kokichi just shook his head. “Are you feeling unwell?” Saihara-chan’s eyes traveled from his forehead to his finger, which still had the bandage on. Like that was even an incapacitating wound.

“Go away mom! I don’t need another mom, Toujo-chan is best mom!” he yelled some nonsense.

Saihara-chan looked at the ceiling like he was summoning his patience, then he just shook his head and put his helmet on. In a moment his conscience was gone.

Kokichi waited for his return, in the meantime, he could not stop rubbing the bandage.

Chapter End Notes

Next time Somewhere:
Rantaro comments the second trial with some help.
The next day started with another call, for the millionth time.

This time it was the staff of Danganronpa, they asked him to go to the hospital, apparently they wanted to talk to all the people that had woken up from the game. Rantaro was sure he knew what this was about. He quickly agreed and called Kaede to explain how the Necronomicon worked. The girl immediately agreed to help. They hurried together to the hospital, it was paramount for them to inform Ryoma and Kirumi of the details before the staff would. Those two were already unsure about the whole situation after waking up; Hinata-san said that they would reject the Necronomicon idea if two of them were to refuse to go back into the game.

The conversation was pretty heavy, they really were reluctant of going back in the virtual world after everything’s that happened. In the end, though, Kirumi’s selfless devotion made her come to terms with it and Ryoma felt compelled to offer his help as well. Thanks to Hinata-san’s timely intervention, the conversation with the staff went much smoother than it would have had otherwise. It was too late for him to go to the studio, so he gratefully made use of that excuse to avoid going on the show for the night.

That night they showed Ryoma being eaten by piranhas, with gruesome details too. Rantaro felt terrible when he realized that the audience was more or less content with him dying. Some were commenting things like ‘he was not adding anything to the show anyway’. Rantaro really hoped that Ryoma was not watching this.

He had a nightmare that night, he was walking alongside Kokichi on a beach on a sunny day, but suddenly the sun turned red and the water became blood. Rantaro tried to walk away from it, but he realized that he was walking on broken glass and not sand. His feet started to bleed and his blood was adding more red to the scene. He searched for Kokichi, to warn him, but Leader was nowhere to be seen. Suddenly bones started to emerge from the bloody water and Rantaro found himself comparing the size to Kokichi’s body type and-

He woke up drenched in sweat and with his heart racing in his chest. He freed himself from the sheets and opened the window to get oxygen. He punched the window frame out of frustration.

‘Damn it all!’

It was still five in the morning, but he knocked on Fuyuhiko’s door anyway. The ex-Yakuza opened it after a while, still in his black pajamas, looking confused and maybe even a bit frightened.

“Oh, it’s you… I wasn’t expecting…” he exhaled loudly. “Is there an emergency?”

Rantaro invited himself in, too flustered to really care.

“We have to do something!”

“Yeah, we are trying to-“

“No, like… really! We have to do something for real!” he interrupted him.

Fuyuhiko recollected himself and sat on his sofa gesturing him to take a seat too.
“Nightmare?” he didn’t wait for an answer. “We all have them. It’s pretty inevitable, unless you are really a twisted bastard. Calm down, unless you have a secret army hidden somewhere, we can’t do much physically. We have to keep working from behind the scene, like we are doing now. But if it makes you feel better… I can accompany you in the studio tonight, it’s time I finally confront this head on.”

Rantaro was truly grateful for his offer. He apologized for waking him up and tried to leave, but Fuyuhiko started brewing black coffee for both of them and he invited him for breakfast.

“How are things going with Peko?” Rantaro asked at some point.

Fuyuhiko blushed up to the hairline.

“Shut up, dumbass! Drink your stupid coffee!” he yelled with a high pitch voice.

Rantaro, now in good mood again, laughed. They reached the studio with a lot of time to spare, but they did not mind. They were waiting in the restaurant appositely built for the staff. After Fuyuhiko had to try at least three suits to find one in his size, the short guy started browsing the internet with his phone. Rantaro tried to mind his own business for a while, but he ended up staring at Fuyuhiko for too long. Fuyuhiko noticed Rantaro staring and showed him his phone, while looking around with suspicion. It was a fan blog for Danganronpa. Fuyuhiko was reading the comments regarding Ryoma’s death.

“I was trying to get a feel for what the audience thinks about this murder.” he was whispering. “This may be useful if we have to play like Nagito does. The general feeling right now is of vague boredom. Ryoma ranked pretty low in the last popularity poll, so his death has not made such a big impact like yours. They talked about you for days; by the way, they were disappointed. They wanted to see you play more, rather than die in the first week just like Byakuya. All things considered, it was a good thing that you died so early, the audience was not happy.” Rantaro was not sure how he was supposed to feel about that. “They are excited about the investigation, though. Many of them want Leader to work with the Detective and create a solving duo, or something along those lines. Since the scene on the stairs, the audience is yapping about them making a good team. What do you think?”

“Leader will not work with him.” he said with confidence. Fuyuhiko waited for him to elaborate. “They amplified his distrusting nature and he has been connected to the Neo World Program for too long. Nagito said that you could feel that something is wrong. Considering these facts, I don’t think he will ever work with anyone. He is making himself hateful on purpose.”

Shirogane was conducting the show personally that night; Rantaro figured that it was probably nighttime inside the virtual world too. What had Kokichi done during the day? Did they open more Labs? He wanted to know, but he could not invite himself in Ryota’s office. Shirogane greeted Fuyuhiko and the audience was overjoyed to see him, the ex-Yakuza didn’t even show up to take his monetary prize, so it was only the second appearance on the studio after the finale of the season. Luckily for him, the night was too full of events for her to drown him in questions.

The investigation was in full mode, as expected Shuichi was working with Kaito, not Kokichi. Rantaro, Fuyuhiko and Nagito already knew both the trick and the culprit, but he was unsure of what was best to say. Should he try to subtly hint at spoilers like Nagito did? ‘Break everything that’s fun’ Nagito said. What was fun in this situation? Discovering the culprit, sure, but what else?

“Wow, he is fish shit now, how nice.” Fuyuhiko commented suddenly. “This murder is hilarious, let me tell ya.”
“True, this culprit must be a show-off.” he spoke up inspired. “Going to such extremes… Are they trying place the blame on Himiko, perhaps? I mean, that’s pretty stupid, right? No one is going to fall for that!”

“Indeed, there was no need for this whole charade. Just killing him was enough, were the piranhas really necessary? This culprit must be repressively aggressive or something.” Fuyuhiko kept playing along nicely.

“Now, now!” interrupted Shirogane. “I’m sure that the culprit has a good reason for this! Please, don’t take this dramatic situation so lightly!”

“Why? This is only my opinion. No one else feel the same way as me?” Fuyuhiko turned toward the audience who responded with a quiet murmur. Fuyuhiko shrugged.

“By the way,” intervened Nagito. “Wasn’t Ryoma eaten by piranhas? How come the clothes, perfectly intact, are near the tank as evidence?” Rantaro observed the scene and sure enough, the clothes were there. He barely contained a laugh. “Someone forgot basic logic in the editing department.” Rantaro had to cover his mouth this time.

A while later, they showed Kokichi observing the two windows, Rantaro was sure that he had most of the trick figured out already. This time, it was Nagito, who spoke up suddenly.

“Oh, I wasn’t aware that someone there was the Ultimate Acrobat, did the killer really traveled from window to window using a rope? What a feat! They must be Spiderman’s relative!”

Rantaro was speechless while the audience laughed softly at his joke. Spiderman. Spiders. Who has a spider web all over her uniform? Nagito had done it again, he spoiled the culprit in a clever way. Most of them missed it, even Shirogane didn’t react in any noticeable way. Still, was it okay to risk so much?

That gave him an idea. Ryota said that she actually failed and they edited the world to look like she succeeded. He knew someone that was well versed in mechanisms, even if it was just a fake memory. He would ask for his help during the trial.

As the night was ending the audience’s attention for the investigation dropped drastically. Now that Nagito had revealed the main trick, all that was left was the identity of the culprit. This time, Shirogane could not do anything about it. The audience was pretty distracted by the end of the show. During the trip back to the apartment, Fuyuhiko looked at the fan blog again and a huge grin formed on his face. Rantaro looked at the screen.

-What a disappointing second case. The victim is boring and the trick is too easy. Man, I want this to be over already, can we see more of Kokichi, Shuichi or Kaito please?-  
-I’m disappointed that they have not shown Maki in a while! She is so hot!-
-Just close this case already, Detective! C’mon even I have figured out who it was, it’s so obvious this time. Ultimate Detective my ass!-
-Well, Nagito basically told us…-  
-Last year the second case was better, it much more realistic-  
-Yeah! And Peko is so hot!-
Suddenly the phone disappeared into Fuyuhiko’s pocket and the ex-Yakuza looked out the window without saying anything. Rantaro observed his red cheeks for a moment chuckling. He went to bed feeling satisfied; the next day he was going to make an even bigger mess. He felt a bit guilty, considering that he was making fun of Ryoma and especially of Kirumi’s crime, but there was really no other way.

The next day he knocked on Kazuichi’s door. The Mechanic opened the door with a sleepy face and greeted him with a wide yawn. Convincing him to take part in the show had not been an easy task, Kazuichi didn’t like the idea of talking in front of so many people. Rantaro had to promise him that he would introduce him to Kirumi. She was Kazuichi’s type. Rantaro was a bit reticent, but he was sure that Kirumi was capable of turning down a guy like Kazuichi easily. Once again, Rantaro spent the day inside the clothing department of Danganronpa choosing something for his friend. Kazuichi refused all the suits and ended up wearing black low waist pants and a t-shirt with a skull printed on it. Rantaro didn’t bother to tell Kazuichi that he would attract more women showing his sweet and dependable side rather than wearing misleading clothes. Kazuichi was actually a giant puppy.

The trial started, once again Shirogane had no time to interview Kazuichi, which was a blessing really. Kazuichi, was prepared as he had already studied the whole case. He used every paused in the arguments to explain the magic trick and water tank use. His mind contained all that was needed to understand how mechanisms worked, even if he had never actually done anything in real life. Then the participants hit a dead end when Shuichi was unable to figure out whose body was transported from window to window. It was the moment Rantaro was waiting for.

“Hey Kazuichi,” he called up to him, “what do you think of this trick?”

“Hmmm, honestly…” he scratched his head. “Honestly, I’m surprised that this worked at all. The culprit is probably very good at tying knots, but still, creating a ropeway between windows is risky. Ropes have a weight endurance level, you know? I’m surprised they had the knowledge to tell that it would hold… I mean, Ryoma’s body mass isn’t much, but they were still two people on that inner tube… And the tube itself is made of sturdy rubber, it can’t be that light. Normally a rope of that thickness would have snapped halfway with that weight on it. Alternatively, the knots would have loosen. Did they use their hand to cut the friction? Were they wearing gloves made of iron fibers perhaps? Such weight would create a friction capable of cutting the thin rope that was used to hang the inner tube to the other rope… Let alone a person’s hand. Furthermore, when the inner tube hit the wall of the gym, the blow should have thrown them both on the floor… Yeah, maybe they held onto Ryoma to be sure he would not fall… But they could use only the other hand to hold themselves. Honestly… why are they not bleeding? And why the rope is not completely frayed? I dunno man…”

Rantaro gave him a grateful look. He would try to convince Kirumi to see him. Nagito looked pleased with the situation as well. Shuichi figured out the trick in the end, but the audience once again was distracted, uninterested. They were fiddling with their phones or chatting loudly. Rantaro was surprised that Shirogane had nothing to say to defend her work. Maybe she was counting on the motive to regain their attention. If Rantaro remembered correctly, someone told him that Nagito had already prepared a speech about that. He could only hope that it was good. It was time to find out.

“So she is the Prime Minister in her backstory hmm?” there he was. “Interesting approach for this one. Killing your citizens. Was there a time limit and I didn’t notice? She could have tried to find a different solution, to protect all her citizens. Instead, as soon as she remembered politics, she instantly went for the kill. She weighed the lives of these thirteen people against the possibility of other lives being in danger and decided in a snap. Not only that, she weighed her life and those of the others and decided that she had to live. What kind of proof did she have that she was really the only person that could save the nation? Monokuma’s words? So much for a selfless devotion. This looks pretty selfish to me. Are there citizens of different value? Miu’s life could be worth a thousand for all we know.
What gave her the right to decide? Oh well. She won’t get my vote at the next election.”

A cold silence was permeating the studio. Shirogane was sitting straight in a tense posture.

“However,” she recovered soon enough, “isn’t that true about your crime too? You tried to kill everyone in a desperate attempt to smoke out Chiaki. That looked pretty selfish to me. Not to mention when you tried to kill Byakuya.”

“Did I ever said that I’m better?” Nagito smiled broadly. “I’m human garbage! I was just examining her crime, why are you getting on the defensive Shirogane-san?” his tone became low and sweet. “You look like a fangirl trying to defend her favorite character. Throwing accusation at other people is not a very mature way to argue your point, you know. I’d love to hear your opinion on her crime, please tell me what you think.”

Shirogane’s lips became a thin line but she smiled sweetly.

“Every person has their own values… I guess hers just are not of your taste.”

The tension in the air made Rantaro’s hairs stand up.

Nagito was really good at this game.

Maybe a bit too good.

Chapter End Notes

Next time on Present Side:
Kokichi's last class trial is about to start. He won't take part in another one, whatever that may mean.

Arguing someone's point with 'you did worse' is a way to say 'I have no better way of defending my position'.
Nagito turned the whole thing against Shirogane with a bit of help from Fuyuhiko and Kazuichi.
The detail about Ryoma's clothes was not something I personally noticed, someone made me notice and I laughed when they did, I just had to add this to make you all notice as well, if you had not yet! xD
The whole Kazuichi’s speech may not be completely accurate, my father used to do climbing so he explained to me some things about ropes but it’s just some very basic knowledge. I still didn't like the fact that the normal rope was the longest, the cable was probably better for the trick... whatever, I didn't make the game they must have researched it... maybe. And about Nagito's speech, you may disagree with me but she really weighted her life and their lives and decided she was more important. Did she have any concrete proof only she could fulfill the role?
Kokichi was observing Saihara-chan reading the text file that Harukawa-chan had found in the computer.

He was almost hoping that the Detective would recognize the title of the window, Neo World Program, and remember something. Obviously, it didn’t happen. He soon reached the modifications the girl did to the program to prepare her crime. He looked at him when he reached his avatar’s setting, the one that would paralyze him on the spot if he touched her.

“Why is there something like this?” he asked him.

“How should I know?! Good thing I didn’t touch her in the virtual world then!” he faked innocence.

“Yeah… but this… and the bottle of poison… it’s almost like…” he put his hand to his mouth reflecting. “She wouldn’t… would she? But then… Why? Why would she…” he looked at him in the eyes. “You really didn’t know about this?”

“Why are you accusing me of something that crazy bitch did?” he faked some tears again. “And here I thought I was your best assistant!”

“Why was she targeting you?” he ignored his charade.

“Why are you asking me?! I’m the victim here!” he yelled a bit louder.

“All right, all right, whatever.” the Detective sighed.

-DING DONG-

-Please assemble at the Shrine of Judgment!-

Once again, everyone started to leave the room and make their way to the Shrine of Judgment. Kokichi tagged along behind everyone, not wanting to force himself more than he really needed to. All of his energy was necessary for the task ahead. Miu and Gonta would become the foundation for destroying Danganronpa, he would make sure of that. At this point, he had a real responsibility, as a Leader and as a person. He needed to make sure that this suffering would not be in vain. He needed to survive this class trial and destroy everyone’s hope. He had to incarnate pure despair.

Saihara-chan, as always, tried to reach for him; he slowed down until he was walking beside him. Kokichi realized, for the first time, that every occasion they spent time together, it was always the Detective’s initiative. Before the Insect Meet and Greet, after the flashback light, after his visit to the Love Hotel, during the exploration of Kiibo’s Lab and in the warehouse. It was always Saihara-chan that tried to extend a hand to him. And every time, Kokichi would end the conversation by running away from him.

‘Kokichi, you are a frigging coward, do you realize that?’

He could not stop the smile of auto commiseration that formed on his lips. Toujo-chan should have killed him instead of Hoshi-chan, it would have been an act of mercy. Or maybe he should have taken Rantaro’s place. He was sure that he didn’t want to be killed by Shinguji, though, that would
have felt like an insult to his persona. Good thing Shinguji agreed with him.

“Why did you decide not to come back into the virtual world? I could have used a second opinion on facts.” Saihara-chan was scrutinizing his face attentively. “I would have sworn that you liked the mental stimulation of solving a case. You always look very smug when you solve a problem. Have you already solved this perhaps?”

Despite Kokichi’s misleading attitude and his forced distance, Saihara-chan had still gone ahead and started to treat him like a riddle. He was solving him, like a Rubik Cube, moving piece after piece with slow, calculated movements. He had been too slow, the time was up. There was nothing more for him to solve, everything had burned down to ashes. ‘Ouma Kokichi’ was a fictional character, a being with no facts, no substance. Saihara-chan was examining an empty shell.

“I am your best partner after all!” he grinned. “Don’t worry, during the trial I’ll help you as much as I can, how does that sound?”

“Sounds good.” he nodded smiling. “What made you change your mind?”

“What?” the change of topic had been too abrupt for him to follow.

“You said that your brain is not free of charge. That I had to gain your help.” Saihara-chan explained with a shrug. “What made you change your mind?”

“Oh, I…” he stopped, realizing that he had no answer for him.

He felt like he said those words a lifetime ago. It was true, it was a lifetime ago. It was another Kokichi, another person. He could not even remember the reasons he said them anymore. Why had he changed his mind?

‘Because I wanted to spend some time with you before it’s too late, because you deserved it, because you are the only one that reached out to me, because you didn’t give up on me, because this is the last time before you’ll hate me forever.’

That didn’t sound like a good thing to say.

‘Because you are the one and only person I really wanted, until the very end, to understand me.’

Same with that.

“Ouma-kun… Kokichi, you’ve acting really strange lately, you realize?” Saihara-chan sighed. “You are giving me so many mixed signals… I don’t even know what to think anymore.”

Kokichi thought Saihara-chan was doing just fine. And was he using his first name? Since when he thought of him being... so close?

“Mixed signals? For example?” he asked.

“Like…” he hesitated a little. “Sometimes I think that we are friends, but then you just go and say things that make me rethink our relationship. But then I wonder if you are lying, or if you are lying about lying. I wonder which of the two is your real self and I wonder how should I discover it. And you are not helping in the slightest.” he sent him a glare.

‘Can’t I be both?’

“I like you of course!” it hurt a lot saying this stuff, but Kokichi didn’t allow himself to falter.
Saihara-chan gasped a little, and then his expression became guarded. “But maybe I’m lying!” Saihara-chan frowned. “Or maybe I’m lying about lying!” Saihara-chan face-palmed.

Kokichi almost wanted to laugh. Saihara-chan was just too precious. He was completely different from Rantaro, who always listened to him attentively, but never fell for his tricks, as he saw him like a mischievous younger brother. Saihara-chan always collected all his words like they were the key to a secret treasure and only by putting all of them together, the correct path would be revealed. It was not that far from the truth actually. Only that he held no treasure whatsoever, only garbage.

"I should have known... You are not going to answer me, are you?" the Detective looked away for a moment, pensive. "You are a liar and often rude and annoying... But... You are interesting too..." he looked like he was forcing himself to speak. "You have a good mind and your motivations are a complete mystery... Maybe it's my Detective side that's so..." he left the sentence to die.

"Hmm?" Kokichi had no idea what he was going on about.

“All right, how about this?” suddenly the Detective spoke up. “Whoever finds the culprit first get to ask any question he wants to the loser. And the answer must be truthful.”

Kokichi felt like an electric current was running through him. He would never have imagined that Saihara-chan would actually start to bet with him. The immense number of possibilities was dancing in front of his eyes, just how many things could he do with him if he was willing to play with him? How many games, how many challenges, how many riddles...

He had already chosen his destiny.

In this life, he existed only as the person that was going to end Danganronpa. In the next life... no, he was not going to think about that.

Kokichi agreed to the bet, he already knew the culprit, so whatever. After a while, they reached the shrine of judgment in silence. They rode the elevator like usual and took position at their podiums. The first thing that Kokichi did was seek insurance. He wanted to be sure to survive this trial no matter what. He had to know exactly how far he could push things. If the majority of them were to vote for him it would be a disaster, but a tie was dangerous too. He asked the bear how ties worked in this game. Monokuma answered that as long as one of them was the culprit everything would be fine. Kokichi realized only then just how much the producers were pushing for them to find the killer with ease.

“Momota-chan is the killer!” he yelled cheerfully. Time to start hell. “He logged out alone while we were still in the virtual world! You were able to move freely and no one would have seen you! It’s clearly you!”

“I get that you want to beat me.” intervened Saihara-chan, Kokichi heard Momota-chan ask 'beat you?', “But don’t jump to conclusions like this. It’s too easy to say it’s Kaito.”

Being this any other occasion Kokichi would have exploded from excitement. Saihara-chan was actually having a true mental battle with him. There was nothing Kokichi loved more in the world than a serious mental battle. He loved them more than he loved Panta, if he even loved Panta in the first place, it could be a fake memory too.

“But Kaito was the only one that could have killed her by poison!” obviously it was wrong but he could not jump the gun, the other idiots would not have been able to follow the conversation if he had just skipped to the virtual world settings.
“Are you losing your touch?” Saihara-chan smiled. “Miu was not killed by poison, her eyes were not bloodshot. No, Miu’s cause of death was the killing game simulation itself. In the text file was clearly written that if you die inside the virtual world, you would die outside as well.”

“Gonta has question…” Kokichi’s heart skipped a beat, was he going to confess right now? “Where is this virtual world place? What floor?”

Kokichi wanted to pull out his hair in frustration but he guessed it was only fair he would suffer as much as possible for this sin of his.

“So,” he intervened before they could waste any time, “let’s review the facts that occurred in the virtual world, all right?”

Chapter End Notes

Next time Somewhere:
Interviews, interviews... and some more interviews.

I know I said I would make some more games for you to play in but... soon the plot will pick up and I can't exactly make you realize all the secrets before reading them, all my hard work would go to waste :P
I'll still make some games but not as often. Of course, you are still welcome to comment and post anything you want!
I want to thank you all for the almost 150 kudos as well, love you all! :3
Kirumi execution had been painful to watch.

Rantaro went to sleep hoping with all his heart that it would not become his next nightmare, he was already disturbed enough. Luckily, his prayers were answered and he didn’t dream at all that night. Knowing that the next day the show would feature Ryoma’s interview and the day after Kirumi’s, he decided to take a break for the time being. He remained at home, browsing through the internet in search of places where people commented on the new season. He made sure to avoid all the sites of fanfiction and fanart.

A little before dinnertime, his friends barged into his apartment and decided to have small reunion dinner at this place. It was Ibuki’s idea, the girl was not capable of spending a whole week without having a party of some sort. Rantaro had nothing against the idea anyway. They ate while waiting for Danganronpa to start and after a while Rantaro started browsing through some more fan sites, specifically the blog that Fuyuhiko showed him before.

“Ah, that’s Chi-chan’s site!” Hiyoko screamed beside him peaking at the screen.

“Chi-chan… You mean Chiaki? Chiaki’s site?” he asked confused.

“Yeah, of course. What do you think Chiaki does all day? I get that she is probably busy with that boyfriend of hers, if you catch what I mean…” she smirked. “But being his assistant is not that taxing. She is managing this in her spare time.”

“Ah, didn’t I tell you?” intervened Fuyuhiko. “I thought I did. You know, the cell phones that Danganronpa provided us after the season had a tracking device in it, and everything we were doing with them was being registered in their computers. Chiaki warned us and told us to buy a new phone if possible. We decided to keep them so Danganronpa’s staff would be fooled into thinking that we didn’t noticed. After we discovered she was secretly managing a site where people commented on the season, we asked her to make our new devices untraceable and we became trolls. Half the comments in the site are actually ours. We needed some way to stir the public opinion of the season in our favor.”

“No, you most definitely didn’t tell me!” Rantaro shook his head. “So that’s what you guys have been doing all this time! It’s a good idea.”

“Later in the season, starting from after the third murder, the production will connect the screen with some of these sites. Shirogane and the guests can see and interact directly with the audience,” explained Sonia. “They do it later though, because at this point the audience is not yet very fond of the cast, they wait until there are fewer people and the audience has already picked a favorite and who they want to win or play again. Normally this happens during the fourth phase of the season. We hope to have changed people’s opinion of the show by that point.”

“Right now, people’s opinion of this murder and of Ryoma and Kirumi are pretty low.” Mahiru concluded Sonia’s speech. “We are expecting a drastic drop of views in these two days. I don’t think that a lot of people are interested in their interviews after you and Nagito have made this case a total joke.”
Rantaro felt a little guilty towards Ryoma and Kirumi, but both of them didn’t seem to enjoy the attention of the audience anyway, so maybe it was a good thing after all. Ryoma’s interview was indeed very lackluster. Ryoma didn’t seem really happy to see Shirogane, and even if she tried to make him speak, he was really reluctant. The interview in general was a real letdown and the views were certainly low.

The next day was Kirumi’s turn to appear. The girl was clearly not happy to be there. She was feeling ashamed of her own actions and seeing Shirogane ask her so many things about her motivation made her become really stiff. Rantaro felt sorry for her. ‘Danganronpa is that kind of propriety’ had said Teruteru once. He was right; once you were caught in it, you could never go back, no matter what new memories you were given. The interview ended after Shirogane asked her whom she thought would win the season. Kirumi said that she hoped Shuichi would win, since she had been mean to him when he tried to uncover the truth. Rantaro was uncertain if the best thing for the Detective was to win or to be a victim as soon as possible so that he could be freed of that burden. He was the one everyone was counting on after all. The show ended for the night after they showed Maki’s talent being revealed by Kokichi. Rantaro grimace when he saw the girl almost strangle Leader. He could never catch a break, could he?

The next morning he was awoken by a call from Danganronpa’s staff. The female voice on the other side asked him to be present for the next show, as Survivor he had yet to give his personal impression on the new season. He already had his interview about the old season, but not one as the first victim of the current season. Rantaro accepted. Chiaki had yet to contact him, so he figured that the Necronomicon was still not ready. And no other murder had occurred. Danganronpa’s production needed to fill some time somehow.

Once again, that night Rantaro sat on his white couch in the studio, for the first time he was alone, Nagito was nowhere to be seen. He wondered if it was a good thing or not. Did that mean that he trusted him to pull this off on his own? Or maybe something bad happened and he had to urgently leave the studio. He surely hoped not. Shirogane started by asking him about the setting, if he liked the school and the cage. Rantaro answered that the cage surely gave a claustrophobic vibe, but the school was nothing special. Then she, looking a bit like a predator, asked him if he liked the island idea better. Rantaro could sense that she had some sort of rivalry with Chiaki. He could not start to fathom why. If Rantaro had to be honest, the island was not very fitting for a killing game, compared to the tense and dark atmosphere the school gave off, covered in greenery and mysteries. However, Rantaro didn’t need to be honest at all. He had not watched any old seasons, but he could guess that no one had ever created an island scenario before Chiaki did.

“I think the island setting was original, though not the first choice I would make. Instead, a school is pretty obvious, right? Since we are teenagers?”

Shirogane smiled but she looked ready to murder him a second time. Then she asked about the plot until he was killed. Rantaro had no doubts this time. Kidnapping and jumping straight into killing was not even considered a plot, at least Chiaki’s season had some attempted justification in it. Again, she looked ready to murder him, for the third time.

“Well then, I guess you really loved the 52nd season, hmm?” she was still smiling. “So, I guess you don’t like the new participants either, do you?”

That hit Rantaro’s nerves. He had had far less time to spend with them, but she made it sound like he didn’t care about any of them at all. It was true that he loved his old cast more, but he wanted to help all the others too.

“Now, now, don’t be so mean!” he said it playfully, but there was nothing playful in him at all. “I
like them too. Even if I had only a couple of days to spend with them, I still consider them my friends!"

“Well, that’s good!” she nodded happily, even if there was nothing happy in her. “Can I get your opinion on them then?”

“Sure.” he reflected for a moment. “Ryoma was a wasted opportunity. He could have lived longer and grown out of his depression, it would have made a good storyline arc for him. Kirumi’s motive is a bit jarring with her personality; personally, I would have liked her better if she had stayed true to her intention of honoring Kaede’s wish.” Shirogane was barely concealing her irritation. “I can’t say that I have a perfect understanding of Miu, she looks inoffensive for now, but who knows what she is really thinking? She may become a murder later. Angie, Himiko and Tenko have this strange triangle going on… Everyone is free to do what they want, but I think that Tenko pushing Himiko so much is only making her fall into Angie’s area of influence. Korekiyo is really creepy. Personally, I would like for him to not kill anyone, just to break the whole concept ‘first impression last’. But after seeing his Motive Video I’m pretty sure that he has something up his sleeve. Maki has a dangerous talent but I don’t see her having a prominent personality, she mostly prefers to stay on the sidelines. Gonta is… well, there is not much to be said about him, it’s pretty clear who he is. Kaito is playing the role of the hero, but his short temper is a huge obstacle. He believes is all well and good, but he loses sight of things pretty easily, everything manages to distract him. If he really wants to be of some use, he should learn to actually look where he is going, instead of just marching right through. Shuichi is a sweet boy, but I hope he doesn’t get swayed too much by Kaito and other people. It can end very badly if he stops being impartial and starts to take inflexible stances like Kaito. Shuichi needs to learn to be independent of anyone… Kiibo… well Kiibo doesn’t really matter, does he? He is set to be just a bot for the program.”

He had been really mean, not untruthful, but mean. He hoped no one was going to hate him for this, it was necessary, unfortunately.

“Wow, you have some strong opinion for a Big Brother!” she made an awkward laugh. “You didn’t mention Kokichi, is he still your favorite I guess?”

Rantaro didn’t really want to lie about this, so he said the truth.

“I liked him better before.” then he added a lie. “Now, he has lost a bit of his charm.”

“You really have something for everyone, don’t you!? Well, then now-“

He interrupted her.

“No, this isn’t everyone, is it? I haven’t said anything about you yet. Tsumugi!” he observed her losing her smile for the first time.

“No, there is no need, I’m not really part of the cast, I’m-“

“There is a need! Of course, don’t write yourself off! Well then, for you…” he faked a look of concentration. “Ah! Maybe you should stop lying to them!” she sent him a confused glance, she was mentally asking ‘are you out of your mind?’, “I’m mean, look at you! You are everything besides plain! You look gorgeous girl, why don’t you wear this dress inside too? It’s fabulous!”

She looked down at her dress like she had not understood a single word he said, then suddenly she realized that she had been silent for too long and made a terribly awkward laugh. Rantaro internally cheered.
‘Take this.’

The audience laughed at her reaction and not even her heavy make-up could cover her blush. Interesting though, Rantaro thought during the trip home, she didn’t consider herself as part of the cast. Was it because she was the host of the season? Chiaki entered the game trying to connect with everyone inside, she was doing the opposite. The differences between the two girls were so incredibly evident, even in the show itself. The two seasons were completely different.

That night, for the first time, Rantaro actually had a good dream. He dreamed of the 52nd cast and his family, all reunited on a beach having a huge party. Rantaro was laughing so much that his stomach hurt. For the first time it was hard for him to wake up, to return to the uncertain reality. He still had not mustered the courage to call ‘home’. He was still too afraid.

That day, for the first time, he actually went out and breathed some fresh air. He had been so focused on Danganronpa that he had forgotten the fact that he was out now. He could go wherever he wanted and do anything he wanted. He put on a hat to cover his hair, which made him too easy to recognize and left the complex. Exploring his neighborhood he discovered that his memory didn’t contain any city, any map, any place. When he thought about places he wanted to go, inside the virtual world, it was always ‘home’ or ‘my hometown’. But now, he realized that he had no idea where any of those were located. The Neo World Program had limits apparently. He explored the city like a newborn child, discovering street by street, remembering things he had forgotten like the existence of flower shops, or the vending machines on the streets and the uniforms that the students were wearing. It was all terribly obvious but every time he saw something, it was like a light had lit up in his brain. The programmer made sure to stuff his brain with information that a Big Brother would have and all the rest was erased, only upon seeing them again he remembered. Inside the Neo World Program, it had been easy to not notice all of this, there was nothing there that would remind them anything specific about the outside world.

That night Rantaro didn’t even think about going to the studio, this day was for himself only. He still watched the show though. They were having breakfast and then they explored Maki’s Lab. Monokuma gave the prize once again and they all split up to try and find the new areas. Kokichi was still stalking the Detective while exploring, but this time he was actually making his presence known. To most people this may not hold much meaning but he knew Leader well enough to understand that Kokichi was actually starting to trust Shuichi. He remembered the first few times Kokichi started to trust him, around the second phase. Even in the previous season, he was so guarded that Rantaro was not sure he could get him to open at all. Now he was on another whole level of distrust. For Shuichi to be able to make him relax a bit… The two must have been more compatible than he initially thought.

He smiled fondly. Kokichi needed a composed, calm and rational person by his side. Shuichi needed someone that would force him to grow out of his shell. They could do each other some good.

Rantaro hoped the two would become friends soon.

Chapter End Notes

Next time on Present Side:
The class trial is not going exactly as Kokichi planned, someone is a bit of a surprise.

I can't imagine how difficult must be to recreate a personality from scratches. The Neo
World Program first erases everything and then starts adding new stuff. Inside the Program they remember how to do normal things, like eat, speak and move but the things that are not inside the simulation can't be remembered naturally. Only the information about talents and backgrounds are added specifically so normal, everyday stuff must be remembered upon direct contact with it.
“So,” Kokichi started exposing the facts, “the ones that searched the mansion were me, Saihara-chan, Gonta, Shirogane-chan and that NPC Momota-chan! The others were searching the chapel, Iruma-chan included. So… in that situation, what happened to her, that caused her to die?”

“Judging by Miu’s corpse,” Harukawa-chan interrupted him. “I think the most logical cause would be strangulation. Only poison and strangulation can make the victim grab their own neck like that, we already ruled out poison, so it must strangulation.”

“Wow, you are really chatty when it comes to corpses. Right, Miss Ultimate Assassin?” he smiled at her to annoy her.

“The culprit probably used a tool…” she sent him a murdering glare. “Something like a rope, maybe.”

“What a Nerd! You know everything, don’t you? Maybe you are the killer!” he said cheerfully. “Anyway, there was no rope in the virtual world! I’m sure!”

“Then you have not looked hard enough.” once again Saihara-chan was fighting him, sending a thrill of excitement down his spine. “There was something else that could have been used as a rope. The toilet paper. Too bad, you should have come back to the virtual world with me.” he concluded with a smile.

Kokichi knew better than him, he was just fishing for answers like always, but seeing Saihara-chan teasing him back was making his head spin a little.

“What are you two doing…?” Momota-chan was looking at them like he could not believe his ears and eyes.

“Momota-chan! I took your place as the best assistant! You can resign yourself, the spotlight is mine now! Are you jealous perhaps?” he giggled at him.

“Let’s go back on topic.” Harukawa-chan didn’t care at all about what they were doing, she had eyes only for Momota-chan after all. “The toilet paper would not tear inside the virtual world, so it’s probably the murder weapon. Let’s move on.”

“All right, if toilet paper is the murder weapon, then what’s that hammer next to her?” he needed to clarify Iruma-chan’s intentions first, Saihara-chan already knew, but he had to explain to the others or this would never end.

“Iruma-san was the one that brought that hammer; she was the only one that could know where the weapon was hidden. It was the program she had studied for many nights after all,” explained
Saihara-chan.

“What was she going to do with it?” asked Kiibo.

“Oh, I can imagine many uses…” Kokichi looked at his nails. “Like… hmmm… meeting with someone and murdering the shit out of them?”

“I knew that you had already caught on that,” said Saihara-chan with a sigh. “She was planning to kill Ko-, Ouma-kun with that hammer. Kiibo told me that you two were supposed to meet on the rooftop.”

“Wow, my secrets are all out in the open for you to see!” he yelled putting his hands behind his head. “Buuut… If you want to prove this to the others you better figure out her plan!”

“Well then…” Saihara-chan went into his deep thinking phase. “First she placed the poison bottle on Ouma-kun’s seat to make us think the murder was committed by Kaito in the real world.” Momota-chan yelled ‘what?’ in the background. “She did it right before she logged in, if you consult the log-in and log-out text file you’ll see that she was the last one to log in. Then once inside the virtual world, she immediately took control of the situation, she split us into two groups and made sure that Kaito was on the rooftop while she plotted to meet Ouma-kun there too. She used a method that only she could use to log Kaito out and then… somehow went to the mansion rooftop.”

‘I see, so this is where you are stuck. You haven’t figured out the secret of the map yet.’

“A method that only she could use?” asked Harukawa-chan.

“The cellphone. She told us that only the phone in the salon could log you out, but she was lying, any phone was good enough, I already confirmed this directly with Kaito.” Saihara-chan answered.

“Yeah…” Momota-chan scratched his head.

“Well, yeah, all this was very obvious, got anything else for me, Saihara-chan?” he smiled at him.

“If you knew then why you didn’t just say so!” yelled Momota-chan.

“First, because none of you would have believed it coming from me…” he paused for a moment making his best smirk. “And furthermore, because I want you all to finally understand that you can’t trust anyone. Especially not here, in this game.”'Momota-chan shook his fist at him, while Saihara-chan frowned. “Anyway, it’s a good thing that she died and not me. She would have been able to lie as much as she wanted about the virtual world settings. None of you is qualified to say that she is lying. Now we are free to enjoy this mystery in peace!”

“You keep talking like this; you sound just like Monokuma…” Momota-chan’s voice was full of repressed anger. “You are a coward, you never speak the truth or show your true face!”

‘Can’t agree more.’

“The hell with this game crap! I’m gonna find the truth by believing in all of my friends!”

‘In which I’m not included, but that’s just fine. This whole speech of yours is the reason why I designed this crime exactly the way I did. Thank you Momota-chan, you are being really helpful this time!’

“If you think you can end this game like this… Sure, be my guest!” he purposely used the word ‘end’ not win. Win, he may be able to win, but end Danganronpa itself? No way.
“All right then, let’s move on.” Kiibo intervened. “Let’s hear Ouma’s testimony.”

“Eh? My testimony?” he faked surprise; they needed to believe that he was the killer, and then he could turn the table on them. “Well, here is my answer! I never met with Iruma-chan! The door to the rooftop was locked!”

“But lock picking is your specialty!” Yumeno-chan pointed a finger at him. “You should have been able to open it easily!”

“We are talking about the virtual world here…” he sighed. “A closed door is more like an invisible wall, not a real lock. And even if it wasn’t, I didn’t have my tools with me.”

“You’re lying!” Momota-chan put his fist together. “When I went to the roof, it was not locked at all!”

“Why would I lie, I don’t wanna die!” well, he was lying.

“Lying would do you a lot of good if you are the culprit…” Yumeno-chan commented.

Kokichi opened his mouth and staged the perfect reaction to the situation. He froze for a moment, as if it was the first time a thought like that had ever entered his mind and then he yelled.

“OHH! You are right! I never thought about that!!”

Saihara-chan face-palmed.

“You are suspicious as hell!!” trust Momota-chan to fall exactly where he wanted.

“Everyone, wait a moment. There is no point keeping talking in a circle like this, the truth will come out eventually.” Saihara-chan tried to pacify them.

“Wow Saihara-chan! You have grown so much! I’m so proud of you, my firstborn son, keep up the good work! My life rests in your hands!” he teased a bit.

Saihara-chan closed his eyes for a moment, looking completely discouraged.

“Can you please be quiet for a moment?”

“Noop! I’m gonna talk until the moment I die!” he giggled.

“I don’t doubt that.” he sighed dramatically. Who knew that Saihara-chan had in him to do a dramatic sigh? The boy never stopped amazing him. “So, I’m wondering how she got to the mansion roof, since the bridge was gone, she dropped it herself. She must have had a plan of some sort…”

“Or maybe she stood me up! She stood me up, didn’t she?! It’s so rude to break a promise!!” he yelled obnoxiously.

“Yeah right, she stood up the person she wanted to kill, make perfect sense.” Saihara-chan commented sarcastically. Kokichi’s heart skipped a bit, **Saihara-chan could do sarcasm??** Why weren’t they married yet? “No, we have Shirogane-san’s testimony, she was seen at the mansion. We just need to figure out how.” oh right, it was because Kokichi was a murderer, that was why they weren’t married yet. That made perfect sense.

The explanation about how Iruma-chan got to the mansion took an incredible amount of time; they were so stupidly set on the idea that a map had to be linear, and not circular. How could they not realize that the two ends were connected in a loop?
Have these people ever played videogames at all? Sheesh.

“So, we need to understand how the map is connected to Iruma-san’s wall.” summarized Saihara-chan.

“I think we are on the wrong track, that wall has probably nothing to do with this…” Momota-chan scratched his head.

“Shut up! You are just slowing down Saihara-chan! He is the only one that can save us all!” he butted in once again in their conversation; his plan to separate them was going smoothly. “Saihara-chan! As your best partner, I’ll give you hints in time of trouble!”

“Kokichi talk like he already figured out…” Gonta was perplexed.

“What-?! Of all people, you are suspecting me Gonta-!” he faked some tears.

He really could not understand how could he lie so well, had he mistakenly judged him all this time?

“Moving on, we know that objects can pass through the wall that she added. The signboard is proof of that.” Saihara-chan took control of the debate. “So, where is the wall she added?”

“As I said, I’m gonna give you a hint!” he attracted his attention again. “You are so fixed on the map that she showed us that you are not realizing the most important part. People you trust will ultimately betray you. If she wanted to kill me it’s obvious that she would tamper with everything she can.”

“So the map was her trap?” asked the Detective.

“Clearly. You just need to look at it, see the paths? They are cut in strange places suggesting that there is somewhere to go after the end of the map. But if you flip the map around a bit, you can see that all the paths were actually connected from the start!” Kokichi explained so that even the idiots would be able to follow.

“I see now!” Saihara-chan’s face lit up. “The wall that Iruma-san set was the middle of the map! While the loading point is actually at the edges!”

“Wow! You are an amazing Detective Saihara-chan! I knew that our lives were safe in your hands!” he flattered him.

“Oh, don’t give me that. This is your deduction, I’m not gonna take the merit for this.” Saihara-chan smiled. “So you already had her trick completely figured out. If you already know who the culprit is just say so!”

‘I wish it was so easy Saihara-chan. This time nothing will be easy. I’m gonna make you go through some serious crap, and you are gonna hate me for this.’

“No, I don’t know yet! However, this trial has finally reached the exciting part! Let’s work harder, Saihara-chan!”

“Tsk, you are really enjoying all of this, aren’t you?” Momota-chan crossed his arms. “Even if you say who the culprit is I’m not gonna believe you! I’ll never put my faith in you!”

‘YES! Thanks Momota-chan! Go exactly where I want, fall for my tricks!’

“Iruma-san was probably killed on the rooftop.” Saihara-chan completely ignored Momota-chan. The Astronaut scratched his head displeased. “Ouma-kun said that the door was locked, I don’t think
that Iruma-chan would lock the door before he had arrived. So the culprit was probably with her at that moment.”

“And since she was the only one to be able to pass through the wall she set and the sign was gone…” Kokichi faked a look of concentration. “It must mean that the killer is one of the people that was searching the mansion.”

“Wait, wait, wait!” Momota-chan interrupted. “Why are you leading the debate now?! Shuichi, do something!”

“Even if you say that…” Saihara-chan sent him an apologetic look. “He is right; the culprit must be one of us at the mansion.”

“How did the culprit move her body to the chapel though?” asked Harukawa-chan. “If they could not pass through the wall…”

“It probably… was not necessary to pass the wall. Only her avatar needed to be moved.” Saihara-chan was talking to himself. “The roof was pretty high… Is it possible that they slid her off the roof and through the wall?”

Kokichi wanted to tell him about the lattice, but he had not returned to the virtual world, and he had not gone to the chapel after the murder. If he said something about the murder scene, anyone would immediately know that he was involved. Unfortunately, the idiots started talking in a circle about things like friction and strength. Kokichi was going to become a monster, what difference would make if he revealed his cards a bit earlier?

“Hey, Saihara-chan! Talk to me if you are stuck!” he whispered to him from the other side of the circle of podiums.

“Are you a Tutorial NPC for an RPG game?” Saihara-chan rolled his eyes with a little smile. “So, what’s your hint? Does it cost game coins?”

Kokichi wanted to marry him. After he reincarnates as a better human being, he would consider it. If he was able to locate his soul again, that’s it. Or, well, if he was going to reincarnate as a slug, maybe he wouldn’t.

“Wasn’t there something on the roof that could have been used to cut the friction? Something that was somewhere else after the crime?”

There we go, no going back now.

“The lattice! They used the lattice!” Saihara-chan’s face slowly started to darken.

Saihara-chan was smart, not a genius, but smart. He would not miss something so obvious.

“How do you know so much about the murder scene, you weren’t there!” Momota-chan shouted at him with rage in his voice.

“Well, Saihara-chan? Do you know who the killer is?” better the cut straight to the chase; he was not going to let Momota-chan take over.

“Well, not you.” Saihara-chan answered without a second of hesitation. Impressive.

“What?! Man, what’s gotten into you?!” Momota-chan was starting to panic.
“Why do you say that?” Harukawa-chan was capable of keeping her cool in most situations.

“Because he simply could not have killed her. Ouma-kun had a special setting on his avatar. Iruma-san made sure that she was capable of killing him without any trouble. If Iruma-san could somehow touch Ouma-kun, he would be frozen in place. The perfect victim. Since the method used for killing her is strangulation, Ouma-kun is automatically out of the suspect list. I knew that from the very beginning.”

Kokichi’s throat squeezed painfully. He had been sure that, by this point, the Detective would completely lose his lucidity. Kokichi could handle hate, anger, disgust, distrust. He could not handle someone that could see beyond his layers of deceit and hit so many targets. He wanted Saihara-chan to hate him already; it would have made all of this so much easier.

“But… it does concern me that you know so much about something you should not have seen… *When* did you see the murder scene?” Saihara-chan was frowning.

“Ah! So you agree that he is suspicious!” Momota-chan smiled triumphantly.

“He is always suspicious, but he is not the culprit.” Saihara-chan once again didn’t hesitate. “Give me an explanation, Ouma-kun.”

“Ah, since my favorite Detective asked, why should I refuse? I’ll confess everything!” he was really going to. Saihara-chan was doing great in pissing off Momota-chan, but he was ruining his plan for his evil reveal at the same time. He wanted them to suspect him before throwing Gonta under the bus, but it was not working at all. Saihara-chan was more stubborn, than he had anticipated. Kokichi should have paid more attention to him. He clearly had underestimated him. “So, let’s start from the beginning. I discovered Iruma-chan’s plan way earlier than this; I’ve actually planned all this two days ago!”

“What the-!? So you are the culprit!” Momota-chan was having a hysterical breakdown.

“So, after poking around the computer, I discovered everything that she was planning and with that in mind, I let her believe that I was clueless. I chose a capable accomplice, lured her to the rooftop and then using my own presence as a distraction, I made my accomplice kill her. After that, I just returned to the salon and made my accomplice get rid of her avatar body. Easy as that!”

Silence.

They were all staring at him with their mouth open. Even Saihara-chan. The Detective frowned deeply when their eyes met. Oh, well, now he finally gained his hate.

‘Good job Kokichi, you succeed.’

“Ah, by the way. The killer is Gonta!”

Chapter End Notes

Next time Somewhere:
Rantaro learns something more about Danganronpa and Byakuya.

I’m sorry there are so much canon dialogues in here... Soon we will leave canon for good, I promise.
On a side note: I decided to change my avatar based on how I think Kokichi is feeling in the new chapters, so every time I change from now on will be a fanart that is meant to represent the current moment of the story.
Rantaro was trying to decide if he was going to the studio that day or not, when he received Kaede’s call.

“Hi, Rantaro, are you busy today? If you are free I thought maybe… we could meet up?” she asked him.

They met at the ice cream shop that was close to the apartment complex; he had the hat again, while she had her hair in a ponytail and wore a pair of sunglasses. Luckily, the people were so used to see them in their game outfits that a minor change was enough to make them invisible. She ordered a Stracciatella ice cream while he chose a combination of Tiramisu and passion fruit. Kaede looked his ice cream with suspicion.

“Does that even taste good? It’s an odd combination…” she lifted an eyebrow.

“No idea!” Rantaro smile cheerfully. “You know, you may think that I’m a boring person, with my Ultimate being the Ultimate Big Brother and such, but I’m actually quite adventurous! I love to try strange stuff! You never know, maybe it’s amazing!”

She laughed as two pink spots appeared on her cheeks.

“Do you have something to ask?” Rantaro brought the mood back to a more serious note.

“Well, yes, I want to know if there is any news from your friends at the company.” she looked around, suddenly conscious that they were out in the open and anyone could eavesdrop.

“Not yet, but I’m sure they will hand out the motive soon enough. They can’t afford many days of inactivity.” he kept his voice low. “Now that I think about it, I should give you Chiaki’s number, so you can ask her directly.”

Kaede looked a bit uncomfortable.

“It’s just… they’re your friends, not mine, I don’t want to… intrude.”

“What are you talking about? My bad, I should have introduced you to the others sooner! We are all friends, it doesn’t matter what season we are from!” he said firmly.

“Before that… would you mind telling me more about them? I’d like to know more about them before…” she frowned. “No, okay that’s a lie, what I actually want is you to tell me your thoughts on your season. If I wanted to know more about them, I could have just looked at the episodes from your season. The Danganronpa site has videos of all the seasons down to the 27th.” she smiled a little. “I want to hear of your experience, the people you met, the things you felt, the things you thought… All of that.” she blushed a bit. “Is it strange?”

Rantaro was taken aback by her request but he was not displeased, it was the opposite. He felt a little bubble of happiness rise in his stomach.

“Sure, I don’t mind.”
They finished eating their ice cream and then reentered the complex, they were about to separate when Rantaro decided to take his courage in his hands.

“Do you want to come in? We can watch Danganronpa together later…” he proposed.

She opened her mouth, surprised but then smiled.

“Sure, but are you sure you want to have me over for dinner? I don’t want to impose…” she was fidgeting with her ponytail.

“As a Big Brother, my cooking skills are not that bad!” he said confidently. “Well, at least I think so… The recipes are in my head, what my hands are going to do is another story…”

She laughed entering his apartment. Once inside, they spent some time chatting about Rantaro’s first season and they searched for the old season to watch. Rantaro was a bit hesitant to watch himself on TV, but he was going to endure it for her. They ate steak and salad, while seated on his sofa watching the first two episodes of Danganronpa 52, or V2 as the man in the blue suit liked to call it. Rantaro discovered, for the first time, that Chiaki never left the Neo World Program. She was not like Shirogane, who wanted the glory in the studio as well. At some point Kaede undid her ponytail and Rantaro thought that she was more beautiful with her hair down.

After the second episode, the one that featured Monokuma’s first appearance, they switched to the new season that was starting. That night, nothing major happened. They just showed the exploration of the school some more. Rantaro sighed watching Kokichi re-explore the areas. He really was distrustful.

When the show ended, it was late; it was already 11pm, so he accompanied Kaede to her door and then went back to his place to sleep. The next day he was awoken, for the millionth time, by a phone call. He needed to change ringtone; he was starting to hate it.

“Rantaro? If you don’t have any appearances on the program today, would you mind coming to Ryota’s office?” it was Chiaki.

Rantaro’s heart sped up; this was probably about the Necronomicon. He agreed and called a taxi immediately. An hour later, he knocked on Ryota’s door. The shorter male, looking even more tired than usual, opened the door and invited him inside. He asked him to wait there quietly, as he had a lot of work to do. The guy looked like he had done two all-nighters in a row, Rantaro wondered what was going on. Twenty-five minutes later, Byakuya entered the room.

“Ah, there you are. We had some problems with the producers, Chiaki and Hajime can’t come to see you.” he told him as a greeting.

“Did something bad happened?!?” Rantaro was afraid that their cover had maybe been blown. “No, not exactly, we just tampered with this motive a little too much and they noticed.” he shrugged. “Hajime is smart; he will convince them all that this is a good thing.”

“I don’t really follow… can you explain?”

“You already know about the Necronomicon, right?” Rantaro nodded. “We could have just put it in there and be happy with it, but Hajime insisted to tamper a little bit with the flashback light settings. We gave Yonaga Angie motivation to use the Necronomicon and to choose you, out of all the victims. Chiaki was not really happy, tampering with the participants’ mind is a line we are not normally willing to cross. Hajime managed to convince us all that having Hoshi Ryoma or Toujo Kirumi back in the game would be useless. So we made sure that she would pick either you or
Akamatsu Kaede. You two look determined to end this. The problem is…” Byakuya hesitated a moment. “Ouma spotted the trick. He is starting to behave out of the script. Shirogane is displeased.”

“Oh no… what is she going to do?” Rantaro’s blood was running cold.

“Nothing, as I said Hajime will convince them, he already had them in his pocket when I left. But…” he looked away. “I would rather not use this method. Chiaki worked hard to show people that Danganronpa could work even without destroying people’s lives and dreams… You see, originally the Neo World Program was used to create a simple virtual world, no murders, no dangers… As soon as the new personality was fully implanted, they let the participants out. However, the cost to maintain the machine was tremendous; some people sought the opportunity. They decided to create plots and broadcast them to the world. This is when the first Danganronpa occurred. Fifty-three years ago. The plots were much more casual before, they tried a bunch of different ideas, but the most popular one was a murder mystery. Danganronpa 6 to be precise. After that one, the first channel of the National television started to broadcast it during the afternoons and Danganronpa became well known. Not only for the show itself, but, for the people that had completed the treatment with the Neo World Program. They all had amazing personalities, they made the public fall in love with the concept of ‘Ultimates’. More and more people asked to be part of the project, especially now that the participation price was much lower thanks to the show revenue. From there… it had been a complete downfall. They started prioritize making interesting seasons rather than giving the participants the personalities they wished for. You see, all the pre-selection interviews are a secret; they are held deep inside the headquarters. No one could complain about their new personality, after all after the treatment you don’t even remember what you asked for. Nowadays they aren’t even subtle about it anymore. The show, the brand, is so popular that a few ‘unhappy customers’ aren’t that big of a deal. Chiaki tried to change that, she tried to bring back the Neo World Program to its original function. Shirogane is doing the opposite. She doesn’t care about the lives she is toying with. She is just an obsessed Danganronpa fan. The major plot points are her ideas; she is doing all of the heavy decision making.”

Rantaro looked at the expression of rage in Byakuya’s face and remembered something.

“Your first season… I have heard that it was… problematic…” he was not sure how to ask without hurt his feelings.

“Yeah, it was. The mastermind was incompetent and the season had a lot of badly planned ideas.” he was still looking away. “In the middle of it we ended up going completely off script and…” ‘A girl died’ completed Rantaro in his mind. “The audience did not realize anything, they loved that season a lot, and all of the crazy situations were fun for them to watch. The mastermind was fired but the audience still loves him a lot. Hajime and Nagito and I are now… we are seen as heroes… The audience is crazy for us. That’s why… I don’t want to be in that studio, I’m not as crazy as Nagito. I can’t look at them fighting with a smile on my face.”

Rantaro wanted to ask a lot more about the 51st season, but he could sense that Byakuya was at his limit. He could watch the season on TV but he didn’t want to. He felt like he would violate the suffering that they went through.

“So anyway,” Byakuya’s tone shifted completely the mood, “prepare yourself, because you will be going back in soon enough. You’ll have your memories, so you have to play it smart. But… I’ve seen you on TV, you seem pretty capable of handling yourself, I’m sure you’ll be fine.”

With that he left the room, Rantaro intercepted Ryota’s eyes.

“If you want to know more about season 51st I advise you to ask Hajime. He is… more willing to
talk than Byakuya-kun or Nagito. I mean, you can ask Nagito but… his version is a bit more cynic than necessary.” he lowered his gaze. “Don’t be mad at him, Nagito had to go through some of the worst things a human being can handle. He changed… he was very different at the start of the season; he was supposed to be a goofy, happy character, you know? His luck was supposed to be comical. And I… I was here, in front of these monitors, all the time. I’ve seen it all.” he looked ashamed of himself for it. “But you don’t need my version of facts; I was not there with them. But it was me… It was me who was the first person to visit Hajime in hospital. I begged him. I begged him to help me end Danganronpa. Please Amami-san, help them. Help them all.”

“I will.” he answered solemnly.

That night, for the first time, Rantaro didn’t watch Danganronpa. Maybe he was going to regret it later, but no one was going to convince him to watch it.

The next day during the afternoon Kaede knocked on his door. She looked a bit shy, she told him that she knocked on his door the day before, but no one answered so she had tried again that day. Rantaro let her in and they binged the whole season of Danganronpa 52nd together. Watching yourself on screen is never easy, but Kaede’s presence made everything look different. The girl was really angry at Monokuma and truly miserable about every death and execution. He was expecting her or anyone that had not lived the season in-person, to underestimate the impact that it had on his life... To not fully understand how all of it felt. He was wrong.

At some point, he found himself brushing away a strand of hair that had fallen on her face behind her ear when she was crying for Gundham. She turned her face toward him in surprise and they stared at each other. Rantaro’s face suddenly started to burn when he realized exactly what kind of atmosphere was developing his living room at the moment.

“Sorry!” he moved away from her.

“No, it’s fine.” she smiled, blushing. “Thank you.”

Chapter End Notes

Next time at Present Side:
Kokichi wins the bet.

Tiramisù is a typical Italian dessert. It's made of cream, biscuits and coffee. It doesn't normally fit well with fruits, but who knows?
“Ah, by the way. The killer is Gonta! Saihara-chan, I win the bet!”

After a long moment of astonished silence, the trial ground exploded with shouts directed at him.

“Wait! When did Gonta kill Miu?!” “That’s a lie! Gonta didn’t kill her! Kokichi is just lying!” “Now you are trying to pin things on Gonta?! You really expect us to believe such an obvious lie?!” “Yeah, there is no way that Gonta could commit this murder!”

Kokichi laughed. What a pitiful bunch. To think that Saihara-chan had already given them all the elements they needed to solve the case but they were too blind to see them. Process of elimination. Everyone except for Gonta had solid alibis.

“Truth is… Gonta and I formed a duo to end the killing game! We must win the killing game in order to end the killing game! It’s so basic, so obvious that I can’t believe I have to explain this! So I came up with the murder plan and Gonta carried it out.”

“Gonta have no idea what he is talking about!” the Entomologist was panicking.

It looked pretty genuine too. Kokichi was confused.

“C’mon, quit lying and tell the truth!”

‘For real. Like, what are you waiting for? A written invite?’

“Gonta is not a liar like you!” Shirogane-chan screamed. “He is telling the truth!”

“No matter how naïve he may be, I don’t think he would ever team up with Kokichi.” said the Robot shaking his head.

‘Yeah, you tell me! I was sure he would be a lot harder to convince!’

“Bah, it’s obvious, Gonta doesn’t understand the virtual world, so Kokichi is trying to trick him! He wants to sacrifice Gonta to escape his crime! You are a horrible human being!” Momota-chan was triumphant.

“Yeah, you are right…” for real. “I did something horrible to Gonta… I was getting bored, so I threw him under the bus!!” he laughed evilly.

“Shut up, that’s not going to work!” Momota-chan showed his first.

“Why are you bringing emotions in a class trial? All we need is logical thinking! Right, partner?” he stared into Saihara-chan’s eyes. The Detective was staring right back without saying anything. “Let me ask you, if it’s not Gonta… Then who is it?”

“You.” Momota-chan’s tone was full of hate.

His plan was working splendidly. Except for Saihara-chan who had not reacted yet to anything he had been saying. Kokichi gave up trying to understand the Detective’s reactions. None of them had been normal since Momota-chan had punched him in the face.
“You guys are soooooo slow! Saihara-chan already told you! There is proof that I couldn’t kill Iruma-chan!” he laughed again then he finally revealed his final form. An expression he had been practice since he first discovered the truth. The expression of a mad man. “Are you all a bunch of dimwits?! Were you dropped on your heads as kids?! What’s wrong with your brains you bastards?!”

“You are talking about the setting on your avatar, right?” Harukawa-chan was as cold as usual; a scary expression had no effect on her whatsoever. “How could had you known that? It’s a lucky coincidence for you, if she had not modified your settings, you would have been immediately voted by now.”

“Coincidence?! Have you mistaken me for one of your stupid friends? Your stupid boyfriend perhaps?” Now that he had unleashed his cruel side it was becoming easier and easier to keep up with his plan. He was letting his mouth speak for him, not holding anything back. “I knew it from the start. Had she not done anything, I had already other seven plans ready!” That was a lie, but he truly had a plan B. Dying.

“As long as the murder method is strangulation, he can’t be the culprit.” Harukawa-chan put a finger on her lips, thinking.

Kokichi could not understand whatsoever what Momota-chan saw in her. She clearly didn’t give two shits about Gonta. The situation was not effecting her in any way.

“Then she was killed in another way!” Momota-chan shouted stubbornly.

“No, we already discussed this. She died by strangulation, end of the story.” Harukawa-chan was merciless, even with her boyfriend.

“You are really desperate to make me the killer, Momota-chan!” he did his signature laugh. “No matter how much you wine about it, you can’t change the truth! Iruma-chan’s killer is Gonta, this is the truth you all adore so much!”

“No! Gonta not kill Miu!” the big guy was still shouting his innocence.

“I’m never going to believe something like this, so there is no point in discussing it!” Momota-chan was still saying the same stupid thing, as if blind belief could change reality. It was about time he learned that life lesson. “Right, Shuichi? You agree, right?”

Kokichi almost pitied him; he was falling in his trap so well, it was almost sickening. Kokichi was expecting some resistance, he was almost hoping to fail and get them all killed to just end the season there and dump the problem on the next set of participants. But he was sure that Saihara-chan would never let them vote for the wrong person. He was not, in any way, hoping that Saihara-chan would try to protect him or clear his name; it was just that he wanted to survive. The Detective promised Akamatsu-chan to help everyone survive. He had to convince everyone of Gonta’s guilt.

“I know how important is to believe, but as the Ultimate Detective, I can say that we can't solve this case simply by believing in people.” be this any other occurrence, Kokichi would have been proud of him. He still was, but there was no joy in that pride. “We need to seriously discuss this.”

“Too bad Momota-chan! Saihara-chan agrees with me!” he grinned. “Oh, the irony! It’s thanks to Momota-chan that Saihara-chan got his act together as a Detective and now his intuition has made him more suspicious of others! Well, it can’t be helped! That’s just what a Detective is supposed to be in the first place!”
Saihara-chan was still staring at him with hard, judging eyes. Gonta started crying and Kokichi’s patience was wearing thin. Gonta’s unsuspected ability to lie was doing his plan a lot of good, but at the same time it was making him feel betrayed like never before. Gonta chose to do this, he said that he trusted Kokichi’s plan, was he lying even then? Kokichi chose him exactly because he was the only person that would actually selflessly follow his plan to the grave. He trusted Gonta with this plan. Sure, it was a sick, twisted trust, but it was still trust. Something very rare for Kokichi to give. He trusted him to be the only person that would not use his plan for selfish reasons. Any other person could have accepted to work with him so they could throw him under the bus and make their escape alone. Gonta was behaving like he was trying to do just that. He was pressuring them with his big teddy bear act and not confessing his crime at all. Kokichi felt lost, lost and angry. Why was Gonta betraying him?

“Gonta, if you understand what is going on, then make a logical argument for the truth!” he shouted at him, a bit angrier than intended. “Use your head to make arguments!”

“Use… head…?” Gonta was looking perplexed to say the least.

“What I’m trying to say is that if you aren’t the culprit, then you gotta prove that you aren’t!” he shouted louder still, his anger was breaking his mask.

“But Gonta really don’t know!”

Kokichi’s bad temperament, normally concealed, fully exploded.

“I’m sick of hearing you say you don’t know! God, why are you so dumb?!” his shout echoed through the whole room making everyone look at him like they had never seen him before. Which was true. “You wanna help everyone like a true gentleman?! Then actually start to act like one and confess the truth! What do you think you are doing here?! Argue back already; just make an excuse or whatever!”

His throat started hurting, Kokichi would often scream and yell but normally he used his high pitch voice, not the raw, angry voice he was using now. Kokichi never showed anger. His voice was not used to this treatment.

“Shut up you piece of shit!” Momota-chan’s angry shout resonated; his voice was used to this tone so it didn’t come out rough like Kokichi’s. “I don’t want to survive if I have to stoop to your level.”

Kokichi was not in the right state of mind to answer with anything resembling reasonable, so he only spat more poison.

“Uhh, that’s a low blow right there… Then just die in a hole for all I care, I wanna live so stop getting in my way!!”

“Shut up,” it was Harukawa-chan that interfered this time, “If you don’t shut your mouth, I’ll close it for you. Permanently.”

“Sorry! It’s Gonta’s fault everyone so upset! But Gonta really not know anything! Really!” he shouted to stop the Assassin.

‘You don’t know anything?’

“You… don’t know anything?” Saihara-chan finally spoke. “I think I know what’s going on here.”

Even in his current state of mind, Kokichi could see the irony; Saihara-chan always had some spectacular proof coming out of nowhere.
This time was no exception.

Chapter End Notes

Next time Somewhere:
Season 51 is a thing.

Yeah, I know, this is short and ends in a strange place...
Hope you are not too disappointed but there was really no better place to stop. Well, unless I could do another extra long chapter but that's not happening, sorry! Just a little more... just a little more...
Rantaro escorted Kaede to her door.

She bowed a little her head to thank him and then closed her door. Going back to his room, he saw Kazuichi peeking through a gap in his door. The guy had a very smug smile on his face and he was looking at him with satisfaction. Rantaro felt like smacking his face or hiding. Rantaro never felt like he needed to hide before. He was used to so many things, especially young children, that he thought nothing could throw him off balance anymore. He shut himself in his room with the certainty that Kazuichi would not let that slide. He decided to call Kirumi first thing in the morning; he needed to distract him somehow. He felt ashamed of himself, using the poor Maid as a diversion, but he was going to do it nonetheless.

Kirumi had gone back home, to her hometown, which was not very far from the city. The girl accepted the meeting without too many problems; maybe her Maid conscience was still very strong, even outside Danganronpa. Rantaro sent a message to Kaede, telling her that he had business to take care of and they would finish watching the 52nd season another day. Rantaro, who was feeling guilt towards Kirumi, decided to accompany the two to a fancy restaurant nearby. He was sure that the formal ambiance would please the girl. When he joined Kazuichi in his apartment and told him the plan for the evening he was expecting the guy to be annoyed at him for coming too, but he was wrong.

As soon as Kazuichi discovered that he had an appointment with a hot girl, he fell into hysterics and thanked him profusely for his presence. He received even more thanks when Kazuichi learned that they were going to a formal restaurant. He was basically in tears when Rantaro helped him choose his outfit. He gave him some advice too. Rantaro had actually persuaded Kirumi to come to the restaurant under the premise that they were going to talk about the Necronomicon with an expert on computers, so he told Kazuichi to talk about computers and his others hobbies; if Kazuichi found his request strange, he didn’t mention anything about it.

The ‘date’ didn’t even go that bad. Kazuichi was shy around good-looking girls, so his weird side was less evident than usual. Rantaro was good at carrying the conversation in a favorable direction. In the end, Rantaro was pretty sure that the Maid had not caught on Kazuichi’s hidden intentions. On the other hand, he was sure that Kirumi had not been especially impressed by him either. Kazuichi had no chance with her, just like with Sonia; he should try his luck on an average girl and focus more on personality next time. Kazuichi was the Prince of Loss Causes, so Rantaro was sure he would recover from the incoming rejection. Probably.

That night, Danganronpa showed Maki, Kaito and Shuichi train together and Angie hang out with Himiko. Rantaro was glad that the participants were somehow able to make friends, even with this season’s plot. With the exception of Leader of course.
The next day, he decided to clean his apartment, it was quite some time that he had started living there and the place was starting to show signs of use. He finished cleaning sometime in the afternoon and soon after, Kaede arrived to finish watching the previous season. The 52nd season ended when Leader described their situation and the two of them decided to stay behind inside the Neo World Program, the last episode was the interview with the winners and the conclusive party.

“Now I can see why you are so fond of Kokichi,” said Kaede at the end of the second to the last episode. “He was like, a completely different person. I can see his talent now, I feel bad for having questioning it.”

“No, it’s okay.” Rantaro shook his head. “Not even I was convinced of his talent after they erased my memories of this season. I thought he was the Ultimate Liar. They ruined his beautiful talent.”

Just then, the doorbell rang; outside were Kazuichi, Fuyuhiko and Teruteru. They wanted to invite themselves to dinner. When Kaede heard Rantaro hesitate, she peeked from the living room and Kazuichi instantly spotted her.

“Ohh, we are intruding! I see!” he had again that infuriating smile.

Rantaro felt his cheeks burning and tried to find some excuse, not sure about why he had to make excuses for her presence in the first place. The girl joined them at the entrance.

“Rantaro was showing me your season, but we just finished now. Were you here for dinner? Please, stay. I’m going back now.”

“No, no, no!” Kazuichi blocked the door with his arms. “You can stay! We can have dinner together! A beautiful girl is always welcome!”

When Teruteru opened his mouth, Rantaro silenced them both with a murderous glance. Kazuichi laughed awkwardly, not sure of what he had done wrong.

“I have a better idea,” luckily Fuyuhiko was a reasonable person, “why don’t we have another party? I’m going to call the others, I’m sure that Akamatsu-san would prefer if some girls were here too.” he sent the Cook a warning glare of his own.

“Oh, please call me Kaede, I don’t like formalities! Thanks for the invite, it’ll be my pleasure!” the girl smiled.

Rantaro tried to ignore Kazuichi love-struck expression.

“She is an angel!” he said dreamily but immediately composed himself when he noticed Rantaro’s stare. “Ah, but she is not my type.”

That was a lie, but Rantaro couldn’t stop himself from chuckling a bit. Kazuichi was a good person. All the others came pouring in like a storm and in five minutes, his apartment was flooded again. Not that Rantaro minded; his brothers and sisters were all cute and irresistible after all. Kaede had a great time. The girl had a natural tendency to fit inside chaotic environments, after a few minutes, she was already behaving as if she was part of the group from the start. She and Ibuki especially had good chemistry, except for the fact that Ibuki loved hard and experimental rock while Kaede was more of a classical music girl.

After dinner, Gundham entertained them with his hamsters, they were not as special as the Four Dark Devas of Destruction, but Gundham had a gift for animals. Rantaro was surprised, but glad that his friend was still raising hamsters in his scarf. Everyone laughed a lot that night and Kaede more so.
The happy atmosphere somehow lasted even after the start of Danganronpa. They finally showed the Necronomicon being given to Angie and Kokichi antagonizing the Student Council. From the sofa, definitely too small for so many people, deafening yells were coming in turns. ‘Leader, punch them in the face!’ ‘They are girls; don’t punch girls in the face, stupid!’ ‘Well, then punch the robot!’ ‘Is that robo-phobia?’ ‘Shut up, you degenerate female!’ ‘Punish these fools for their insolence, Leader!’ ‘Or let that trashy bitch over there kill them all with her obnoxious voice!’ ‘Hey, who touched my butt?!” ‘Oh, my bad, HAHAHA!’ ‘I don’t mind if you touch my butt.’ ‘Eww! Shut it you perv!’

Rantaro’s stomach was hurting from laughing so much, he had tears in his eyes. He somehow found Kaede’s eyes and she was in similar situation. It was a beautiful night. His sleep was peaceful and undisturbed. The following afternoon he found Kaede waiting for him outside of his door.

“You are going to the studio, right?” she asked. “I’m coming with you.”

Shirogane greeted them with a malicious smile when the show started.

“You two are always together lately… Care to give us some details?” she teased them.

She wanted to give a scoop to the fans, didn’t she? Rantaro was pretty sure that fanfiction of him and Kaede were already popular even without Shirogane’s help.

“Rantaro has kindly shared with me stories of his previous season.” Kaede quickly took control of the discussion. “They are all particularly charming, especially since I have learnt about Kokichi for myself and seeing a different perspective is always a great thing.”

“But you could have seen the whole season on TV, there was no need to ask him, was there?” Shirogane tried again.

“Oh, c’mon Tsumugi!” Kaede put all the sweetness she could muster in her name. “Don’t tell me that having at your disposition the authentic Ultimate Survivor you would rather watch the show on TV!”

Having nothing else to add, Shirogane started the review of the participants’ day. Rantaro was really proud of Kaede, he had forgotten just how well she had handled herself during the first class trial. For some reason it looked like the producers already knew that she would be there. The video with the mix of daily moments was incredibly focused on Shuichi. First, he played a match of the popular card game with Kokichi. Leader looked like a cat playing with the mouse before eating it. As the match stretched Rantaro realized that Kokichi was doing it on purpose, he was stealing time from the Detective by stalling the game. At some point, Rantaro had an uncertain feeling, like he was missing something. Then the Detective spoke with Maki and Kaito and tried to talk with the Student Council members. Shirogane was cruelly hung on the fact that Shuichi ‘surely’ had feelings for Kaede. To Rantaro surprise, the girl didn’t seem perturbed or guilty at all like Shirogane was clearly hoping for. Later, during the ride to the complex, Kaede revealed to him that Shuichi was not straight, so at best, he could feel only feelings of friendship towards her. Rantaro was very surprised, the guy could give the impression, sure, but why was she so sure? If they had talked about this Shirogane should know it too.

“No, we didn’t talk about that, but you see…” Kaede smiled confidently. “Normally boys have some kind of reaction after seeing a girl’s panties. Shuichi didn’t even realize that he was doing something strange until I made him realize.” she chuckled a little. “And I consider him a friend too or maybe a little brother? His shy attitude made me act like an older sister to him. Especially since he has a strong spirit under his weak appearance. I wanted him to let it out.” she paused for a moment. “By the way
have you noticed how Kokichi was flirting with him? Geez, I know he said that he likes ‘cute boys’ but I had no idea he was so bad at hiding it!"

Rantaro felt like a complete idiot. That was what he was missing earlier! He was so used to Kokichi’s playful flirts that he could not recognize a serious one! Kaede laughed at his expression.

Rantaro spent the night worried. If Kokichi was going to fall in love inside the game and Shuichi died… He was already scared of him becoming like Nagito, but now there was an even greater danger. He decided to finally talk to Hinata-san to learn more about the 51st season. Maybe there was a clue to end all of this within that season. That morning, he called Chiaki and the girl agreed to pass his message to her boyfriend. Shortly after, he received a call from an unknown number and he picked up.

“Good morning Amami-kun. I’ve heard from Chiaki that you want to talk to me?” Hinata-san’s neutral voice was on the other end.

“Yes, it’s about the 51st season… If you don’t want to talk about it, it’s alright.” Rantaro didn’t want to lure him somewhere under false pretenses.

“No, it’s fine. I knew someone would ask eventually.” Hinata-san gave him an address and asked him to wait for him there.

Rantaro went to the location. It was an unmarkable road. A little confused, he waited until a black car stopped in front of him. Hinata-san was driving it. Rantaro hoped in and waited in silence as the car traveled out of the city. Hinata-san stopped the car near a panoramic viewpoint in the mountain nearby.

“Sorry for the trip, but this story is best told away from preaching ears.” Hinata-san reached the panoramic view and sat on a bench. “And seeing the sky as I tell the story will keep my claustrophobia at bay.”

‘Claustrophobia?’

“This is a long story and not a happy one, are you ready?” Hinata-san waited for him to nod before staring up at the sky. “First… the setting. We were trapped inside a huge skyscraper in flames. You see, we never realized that we were inside virtual reality. For us, until the very end, everything was incredibly real. Looking back at it, the flames were too slow and moved in a fixed pattern, something that normally doesn’t occur. Thanks to the Neo World Program and partially to the drama of the situation, we never noticed. Not even Monokuma was there, we received communications from monitors all over the place in one of those fake voices. Basically, we had the opposite of what the other season had, instead of starting from a small area that expanded over time, we started with a huge area that was slowly being consumed by flames. Since the beginning, the lower floors were completely burned so we could only go higher and higher as time passed. We started in sixteen, like always, and our motives were… a little more grounded than yours. We had to fight for food, medicines, water, flashlights, oxygen masks… Not only that, we were constantly separated by new walls, new obstacles, new dangers. So we were never all together for a long period of time. There were no trials, no body discovery announcements… Nothing. We were just a bunch of kids forced to confront a crisis bigger than us.”

Rantaro was absorbing every single word that Hinata-san spoke.

"People would die and we barely noticed thanks to the smoke and the groups constantly changing. The only person I was always with was Nagito. In that situation, bonds grow at a different rate than in a normal atmosphere. I started to consider him a friend, my best friend even. He was… very
different at the beginning, he was the one to always push people forward; he had a strong hope and spirit. I was always the one to give up and be pushed around. When only eleven of us remained, things got out of hands. The mastermind died inside the virtual world in an accident and to keep things realistic he could not go back in. Ten were left and nobody was monitoring us from the inside. The Ultimate Survivor from the 50th season suffered from the excessive exposure to the Neo World Program, just like Nagito did in your season. She, Ando Ruruka, was the Ultimate Confectioner and suffered from starvation more than anyone else, she went into a killing spree. She, alone, killed four people. In these four was included her boyfriend, both in that world and in the real world, the other Ultimate Survivor for season 50th, Sonosuke Izayoi. She was executed, obviously, and with that, only six of us remained. Me, Nagito, Byakuya and three girls, Mukuro Ikusaba, Seiko Kimura and Miaya Gekkogahara. Mukuro was a Soldier, Seiko a Pharmacist and Miaya a Mental Health Counselor. Nagito had been badly hurt by Ruruka, his arm was in a really bad condition. The producers placed the medicine to stop the infection on the other side of a long hallway filled with fire and smoke. Mukuro decided to go, as she was the Ultimate Soldier. She… died. She was burned alive. Later, once I was outside the Neo World Program, I discovered it had been a glitch in the system. Her death had been so unexpected that her feeling of pain had not been deactivated. Normally when someone get hurt in the Neo World Program they shut the direct connection to that person’s nerves. This time, they took too long and the pain was transferred to her real body. Normally, this would only cause her suffering but this case was different. Mukuro had a heart malformation; the shock gave her a heart attack. Before the doctors could try to save her, she was already gone.”

Hinata-san took a brief pause, closing his eyes.

“We could not get Nagito’s medicine, so we had to cut his arm. Seiko, the only one with medical knowledge had to do it. After that… she snapped under the pressure. We had to trap her inside a room to make sure she would not hurt anyone. It was… really bad. Miaya felt responsible too, since she was supposed to be able to help her. After that, the producers were so focused on covering up Mukuro’s death that we were left to ourselves. No food, no water, and no medicine for Nagito… Me and Byakuya were the only ones still capable of exploring the building. We found the roof and finally saw the sky for the first time. We slowly brought everyone to the roof… We had to render Seiko unconscious, and so we waited. There was nowhere to run, nothing to do. We just waited for the flames to consume us. The producers finally remembered our existence and they sent a ‘helicopter’. Since we had not realized that we were trapped in a virtual world they decided to choose the three winners that way. They told us that only three people could ride the helicopter, two had to be left behind. Byakuya grabbed the two girls and threw them inside. Lastly, Nagito pushed me in. I went completely mad with desperation. I woke up and people smiled at me, they told me ‘nothing happened, everything is fine’. I really thought I had gone crazy. Ryota saved me. He came to my room and pleaded me to save Nagito and Byakuya. To destroy Danganronpa. I was not hoping for anything else. He saved me and Chiaki healed me,” he looked him in the eyes. “There you have it. The glorious 51st season of Danganronpa.”

There was a beautiful summer sun in the sky, yet Rantaro was feeling an unbearable chill run through his body.

Chapter End Notes

Next time on Present Side:
Fall my tears...
Ruruka and Izayoi are not part of the story, it's just a mention I'm going to give them :)

(Cit. Gundham)
“Gonta, you have amnesia, right?”

“Amnesia?! What are you talking about Shuichi?” Momota-chan was shouting again, was his throat refractory to pain?

“When he entered the virtual world we had to connect the cords to the helmets. It’s possible that he improperly connected them. They were supposed to connect memory and conscience, there is the possibility that he lost of his memories concerning the virtual world.” the Detective explained with calm rationality.

Kokichi’s anger dissipated like snow under the summer sun. Gonta was not lying. He truly was not capable to lie. He was not betraying him. He was not trying to hurt Kokichi. He just forgot. Goofy, clumsy Gonta made a mistake with the cords. He was left-handed and after hearing Iruma-chan’s explanation and Yumeno-chan’s comment about using the hand you you’re your chopsticks with, he mistakenly switched left and right. Kokichi lost all his will to talk, he just waited patiently as Saihara-chan and Momota-chan had a confrontation. Saihara-chan was finally convinced that Gonta was truly the killer. Momota-chan was the usual stubborn fool, but his foolishness was precisely what Kokichi wanted from him. He observed them; thinking that the audience was probably having a great time, this spiciness was surely welcome after all the mushy feel good crap they were forcing all this time.

This was an authentic killing game. Full of suspicion, anger, resentment, despair and pain. The more pain and despair he was to cause, the more the audience would get addicted to this. Everyone, on the surface, would declare they loved peace but actually, they were craving for negative emotions. Because seeing strangers, with quirky personalities and flashy abilities, overcome despair was a great medicine for anyone who was feeling discouraged, had a bad day, or was having a bad life. The more pain they suffered, the better the feeling of triumph at the end, when the happy ending was achieved. If they had created a show with happy people doing happy things it would never become a hit, people were naturally jealous of others’ happiness. No one wanted to see kids having fun and solving everything with friendship and love. Kokichi was sure that everyone right now, from the other side of the screen, was cheering for Saihara-chan to somehow close the case and make Kokichi the guilty one. That was because Gonta was gathering everyone’s pity. But actually, on second thought, if Kokichi died right now the game would become a lot more boring than the alternative. It was a paradox, but the hate that Kokichi would earn was going to be his pass to live longer. People would not understand it immediately but in a couple hours, they would be overcome by the excitement.

What was Kokichi going to do now? Was he going to kill them all? One by one maybe? Was Saihara-chan a worthy rival? Would Momota-chan take the lead? Would the two make up? Would they become enemy? Harukawa-chan was going to stop hanging out with Saihara-chan? On what side would the others decide to stand? It was so obvious. Between Gonta and Kokichi, who had the potential to make the season the best ever? Not Gonta. Not Gonta. Definitely not Gonta.

People’s heart was going to beat faster; they would start to yearn for more screen time with him. They would spy on him, scanning every word, every movement, searching. Was he going to kill them all? Was he going to win?
He was going to make everyone fall in love with the tension.

And then, he was going to deflate it like a big balloon without a knot at the end. All the air was going to escape and it was going to become small and insignificant. Everyone was going to hate the season. They would never forgive him for disappointing them all.

“Well, then!” he interrupted the sterile conversation the two were having. “It’s decided, the killer is Gonta! Let’s just vote already!”

“Gonta has no motive to kill Miu! This is all a lie!” Momota-chan was still on the same point.

“The motive, in this case, is irrelevant, I came up with the murder plan so I needed to have a motive, not him. I wanted to live, so whelp! I had to hire a bodyguard! That’s all!” it wasn’t even completely false to be fair.

“Why did you plan it this way?” Saihara-chan was looking straight into his eyes. “There is no incentive for having an accomplice; you are not free to go. There were other ways you could have committed this murder without Gonta, I know you could. You are too smart to have carelessly made this mistake. There is a clear objective in you killing Iruma-san using Gonta. What is it?”

Keen Saihara-chan. He was already on the right track. Kokichi needed the vote before taking the next step.

“This murder is impossible for anyone but Gonta. Monokuma, why are we still talking?” maybe this would work.

“Convince everyone, little Leader, then we can talk about the vote!” no luck there.

“All right, Saihara-chan! You don’t want everyone to die, right? Ignore the stupid idiot by your side and convince everyone else, please! They will never believe it if it's coming from my cute lips!”

Saihara-chan sent him an angry glare, then faced Momota-chan and talked as calmly as possible. He eliminated one by one all the people present in the room, except for Gonta who was crying loudly. Momota-chan’s anger now was directed in equal measure towards him and towards Saihara-chan. The guy really could not accept defeat, could he?

“Process of elimination wins again! Here is the thing you guy wanted so badly! A truth without any lies!! Iruma-chan’s killer is Gokuhara Gonta!!” he yelled on top of his lungs, he was sure that the audience would appreciate his antics much more than these people.

Finally, finally, the bear decided to let them vote and end this torture. Another one was going to begin soon enough anyway. And even before that… there was Gonta’s execution. Kokichi had not thought much about that, he was not ready to see someone die because of him. Sure, technically Iruma-chan was his fault, still, Gonta had part of the blame for that. This time he and only he, was to blame for this. He was killing someone only to get a shot at damaging the show.

He really was a horrible person.

If he had been on the other side, on Saihara-chan’s side or on his own side when it was Nagito who was doing this… He would never forgive himself for this selfish act. He never thought he could forgive Nagito completely, but he was wrong. He had been the one in the wrong that time. He should have let Nagito win and create a terrible finale of the season. Deep down, Kokichi knew that it would not have been enough to end Danganronpa. Nagito had not taken enough risks. Killing himself was impactful but not groundbreaking. He was not sure his plan was enough either but he had to give it a shot anyway. He owed it to all his friends. Even the ones here right now, even if he
didn’t exactly consider them friends, at least not all of them, and even if they surely were not considering him a friend. He owed it to all the people that have been in this situation before too. Season 52\textsuperscript{nd} was surely preceded by season 51\textsuperscript{st} and before that other 50 seasons passed by. Fifty years of Danganronpa history. Kokichi was like an ant, fighting against a bear. The best he could do was bite. And he was going to bite with all his strength.

The result of the vote came in and someone voted for him. Kokichi knew who that person was. So he was really willing to die to keep his faith in Gonta. But after all his speeches about the value of life, now he was trying to kill everyone just because he was pissed? What a joke of a person, really.

They stepped out of their podiums and everyone was sending him murderous glares. Good.

“Are you satisfied now?” asked Saihara-chan with a low voice. “What were you trying to accomplish here?”

“Ah right, I guess it’s time! Gonta, explain!” he prepared himself for playing along with the whole ‘truth of the outside world’ thing.

“Gonta doesn’t remember anything, stop messing around!” yelled at him Kiibo.

“Oh, then I suppose we should go back into the virtual world! Unless you have a way Monokuma?” Gonta’s memories surely were somewhere; the Neo World Program was too powerful to lose data like this.

The bear snickered and pulled out a computer from behind his chair, Kokichi wondered why he didn’t just make it appear out of nowhere since they were not that subtle in general, and he started to push buttons at random. Like that was even a plausible way to use a computer. After a moment the bear showed them a chibi Gonta on the screen, ‘Alter Ego Gonta’ he called it. He was composed by the memories that Gonta lost when he logged out of the virtual world. The two Gontas started a conversation that was making Kokichi’s head hurt, too much broken Japanese for his mind to bear. After a while, and with his help, finally Gonta from the computer was able to explain about the flashback light and the outside world. As predicted the chibi refused to reveal what the outside world was, that was for Kokichi to reveal later. When Gonta said that he didn’t want to reveal to them a true despair, all of them looked shaken, but still pretty skeptical. Even when Gonta told them that he decided to kill Iruma-chan on his own free will, they didn’t really believe him, but it was perfectly fine for Kokichi’s plan. Everything was progressing smoothly until both Gontas, for a reason Kokichi could not really accept, asked the others to forgive Kokichi. He said that he was their friends and he was not to blame for this. Kokichi could see why the one inside the screen was defending him, while he could not really agree on the fact that he was forgivable at all, but he was not expecting the other one to say it too. The pain that he had been trying to suffocate until that moment started to flow out. Kokichi was remembering another place, another time, where everyone looked at him with smiles on their faces. Where everyone trusted him and respected him. Gonta was making him remember something painful, a moment where he could not hold back his tears. The big guy’s soul was as pure as another soul he met, some time ago.

Monokuma called the punishment time. Kokichi realized, maybe for the first moment, that Gonta was really going to die. Yeah, he was going to wake up on the other side, but he was going to die. What was like to die? Would you remember dying on the other side? Would you remember the pain? Too many thoughts were flowing in his head as he reached for the Entomologist, he wanted to grab him and protect him, even if there was absolutely no way he could.

“If you are going to punish him, punish me too!!” he yelled at Monokuma completely forgetting everything, his plan, his objective. “Gonta don’t go!!”
“Gonta is not scared, Gonta is okay, only promise to be friend with everyone Kokichi.”

Kokichi watched the punishment, but not really, his vision was completely out of focus, he was seeing only colors dancing around.

“And that is why, until the very end…”

Something black and white was in front of something big and brown.

“Pride! Conceit! Courage! Insolence! Fearful of nothing! Daunted by nothing! Let us laugh uproarly!”

A sound like gunshots filled the air.

“I shall stick with my evil until the very end! Open Sesame, Pandaemonium!”

Something red and orange covered all the brown.

“I shall fill hell with true hell!”

In the silence that followed, Kokichi’s tears were unstoppable; his body was shaking, cold like a blizzard.

‘Yeah… That’s right… Until the very end… I shall stick to my evil until the very end… I shall fill this hell… with true hell…’

Chapter End Notes

Next time Somewhere:
Fukawa Ryoji.

As I said some time ago Gonta's execution is on the same emotional level of Gundham's execution for Kokichi, that's why he remembered the feelings he had that time. And Gundham's last words.
At the time these words were of pride, of sticking to your own ideal until the very end.
Now Kokichi has taken them and given them a more literal meaning.
They are the mantle he has chosen for himself.
Hinata-san drove him back to his apartment in silence.

Rantaro had seriously no idea what to say to him. Nothing he could say would hold any meaning; they would only be empty words. He wanted to ask where the other two winners had gone but he could not bring himself to do so. Hinata-san looked normal while he was accompanying him back, but Rantaro was not sure if he really was okay. No wonder the guy never smiled, Rantaro would not have been able to smile either after that. He stopped the car a street away from the complex saying that he could not be seen with the cast of the 52nd season, the producers were afraid he would spoil things, like he was indeed doing. Normally, he would use Chiaki as an excuse to justify their presence inside Danganronpa's headquarter but Hinata-san had no direct connection to any of them, it would look too suspicious.

Rantaro could not bring himself to watch Danganronpa, he could see why people were excited to watch a season so full of tension and dangers, but knowing the feelings of the people inside made it sickening. Was the world really so insensible to pain and suffering? He would never suggest making the 53rd season a living hell just to disgust the audience and convince them to stop watching, not with Kokichi inside. However, that made him wonder if there was even a limit to what the audience was willing to watch. Probably only something completely trashy would convince them to stop.

How could they make the 53rd season complete trash?

The next day he was about to enter the studio when Nagito approached him. Thinking back to what Hinata-san had told him made him feel guilty toward the guy. He surely had been a twisted bastard, but hell, he had a good reason.

“It seems you have some interest in the 51st season.” he was smiling like always. “Anything I can help you with?”

“How do you know about that?” Rantaro was under the impression that him, Byakuya and Hinata-san weren’t really talking much between themselves about the past.

“Oh, Hajime is not capable of keeping secrets from me. He feels too guilty, you see? It was not his fault but his biggest weakness is his sense of responsibility. And he has a soft spot for me in general. Hajime has told you what happened, right? But I’m sure you felt awkward about asking him for a lot of details. You don’t have to worry about my feelings since I’m human garbage, ask away!” he looked cheerful as usual.

Rantaro had a terrible stomachache. Now he knew why he was acting this way, but it was not possible for this to be a healthy way to confront his past.

“I was just wondering where the other two winners are…” he didn’t need to know more about the season itself, it was an ugly scar for all of them.

“You mean Seiko and Miaya? Seiko is hospitalized inside a psychiatric ward. She is getting better; eventually she will be able to leave from there. We don’t know where Miaya is, she ran away as soon as they discharge her from the hospital.” he answered with simplicity, uncaring.

“And… all the others?” he tried to ask, not sure he really wanted an answer.
“No idea, they went back home I guess. Except for Mukuro, obviously. The family got a legal procedure and they had to pay a penalty. They were accused of keeping the daughter’s illness a secret in order to damage Danganronpa's image. They didn’t even know about her illness, it was terrible for them and they even got accused of intentionally killing their daughter. The Danganronpa executives are all charming people.” he was still smiling.

Rantaro was feeling sick. He was in no condition to enter the studio. He left and went back to his apartment, his stomach tied in a knot. That night he could not sleep, both the conversation with Hinata-san and the one with Nagito kept replaying in his head hopelessly. There was just no way to ruin something like this… Danganronpa was fated to be eternal. For the first time since he escaped from the Neo World Program Rantaro was feeling a stinging nostalgia for his home, for his family. He had been out for quite some time, why did no one try to contact him? He appeared on TV multiple times already. There was no way they didn’t know he was awake.

It was already morning when he stopped browsing the internet for information about the legal proceedings against the Ikusaba’s family. There was nothing. Apparently, it was not that uncommon for people to disappear after the end of the season, so the audience didn’t know about her death at all. It was inexcusable. He called Danganronpa’s staff and asked to have information about his own family. They gave him an address. His family was living in another town pretty far from there. He knocked on all the doors of the complex that were occupied, said goodbye to everyone and called a taxi. The trip took four hours; luckily Danganronpa’s staff was paying for the ride. He was actually happy to cause them to waste some money.

When he rang the doorbell of ‘his house’, he had his heart in his throat. The minutes that took for the door to open felt like hours to Rantaro. The man that opened was blond and his facial features were not Japanese. They stared at each other for a long moment, Rantaro slowly recognized him, digging through his memories, he identified that this man was his mother’s second husband. The man seemed to find his voice again.

“Ryoji… You are back…” suddenly Rantaro found himself pulled into a hug. “You are back! You are back! Have you forgiven us?” the man was already crying.

‘Forgiven? Ryoji? Oh, right, that was my name, right?’

The man called inside the house and a Japanese woman came out in a hurry. She put her hands to her mouth in surprise and then joined the hug. Rantaro was petrified, he recognized the woman too, she was his father’s third wife in his memory. This was so surreal that Rantaro was feeling faint; he had no idea what to say or do. They pulled him inside the house and seated him on the couch, bombarding him with questions, barely caring that he was not answering any of them. He needed time to conciliate his memories with reality. His mother’s second husband and his father’s third wife were actually his biological parents and they were married to each other. Why would Danganronpa’s story writers wrap reality like this was beyond his comprehension. While they were still asking questions he scanned the living room with his eyes searching for some kind of proof that he had some sibling. He could accept his ‘new parents’ but he really wanted a sibling. Even a male or an older one. Anything. He needed to feel grounded again. He saw a picture frame and quickly got up to pick it up. It was a photo of him, his parents and a blond girl.

He had an older sister.

Fukawa Ryoji had an older sister.

‘Thanks all the Gods! I have a sister!’

Feeling much, much better he turned to smile at his anxious parents who were spying on him in
“Sorry, I’m just a bit disoriented right now!” he tried to sound cheerful. “Can you tell me the name of my sister?”

“She is Yukiko. Don’t you remember her?” his father asked worriedly.

“No, I’m sorry. I only remember having younger sisters, not older ones.” they stiffed for a moment, an odd reaction, but Rantaro could understand. “You know right, that Danganronpa gives us false memories? Can you please tell me as much as possible about everything? My life, your life and my sister’s?”

They talked until night and Rantaro was relieved to see that at least their backstories were still what he remembered, even if he had the marriage order completely messed up. His father was Spanish, he visited Japan on a vacation an ended up marrying his mother. The story was the same as his mother’s second marriage. He discovered that Amami was actually his real last name, from his father’s part, only he was registered with his mother’s for bureaucratic reasons. Something about his father not being yet a Japanese citizen when he and his sister were born, they could marry only later on in the years. His sister, Yukiko, was already of age and she was living in another city working as a tourist guide, she was fluent in Spanish after all. In the end, Rantaro asked why they had not come to visit him. That brought silence in the room. They looked at each other before his mother answered.

“Ryoji… You probably don’t remember, but you ran away from home almost two years ago. We were informed that you took part in the new season only later, when you were already in. We didn’t even know that you wanted to enter, while we could see why when we learned about your talent…” she hesitated and they both looked down. “We didn’t come because we knew that you were angry at us. We had a friend keep an eye on you though. She told us that you were not ready to meet us yet. We… accepted your decision.”

“A friend? Who?” this was news to him.

“Nanami Chiaki, your friend, was the one that contacted us during your first season. Since then, she has visited us a lot to assure us that you were kept safe. She is such a sweet girl…”

Rantaro was surprised, there was still so much that he was ignorant about. He had no idea that Chiaki was reassuring the families too. He needed to thank her as soon as possible. His parents insisted for him to spend the night there and Rantaro accepted without hesitation. He was not planning to go back to his apartment until he had all the answers he wanted. He would have stayed in a hotel if they had not offered. Danganronpa’s money was really convenient. His room was exactly like he remembered, at least.

The following morning his parents surprised him saying that they had called Yukiko back home. It had been two years since she had seen him last and she was eager to see her little brother again. It was a new feeling for Rantaro to be called little brother, but it was not bad. She would arrive the following day. That day the three of them visited places all over the city; they wanted him to see his school, his football team and their favorite family restaurant. At some point, the stopped the car near an iron gate, Rantaro recognized it as a cemetery. He observed them without understand until his father spoke.

“Ryoji, we talked about this after you went to bed last night.” his tone was serious. “This is the reason you ran away from home in the first place, but we can’t keep it a secret. Especially since you are an Ultimate Big Brother now. Ryoji no, Rantaro… Here rest your little sister, Futaba. She… one day during a festival, she ran ahead alone and fell into the river. She was five years old; she didn’t know how to swim… It was our fault, we should have kept our eyes on her. Since she was our third
child we were confident in our abilities as parents so we had gotten careless. You never forgave us for her death. You had every right to be angry, you have every right... If you don’t want to come back home with us we will understand, only... don’t disappear on us again, please.” his voice was broken, just like Rantaro’s heart.

Now everything made perfect sense. Why had Ryoji asked for such an odd talent. Why he was constantly feeling the need to have siblings...

“I think…” his voice was shaking but he kept going, this was important. “I think that Ryoji felt like he was a failure as brother himself. He asked them for that talent, of all things, because he had wanted to be a better brother for Futaba.”

Visiting her grave was one of the most difficult things Rantaro ever did. He observed the picture on the grave and recognized her, she was the second youngest sisten in his memory, they only changed her name. His memories of her were maybe all fake, but the grief was real. Very real.

Once back home he visited her room, it had been left intact. After her death, Ryoji ran away from home and his parents had to deal with the loss of two children at once. Both rooms had been left clean and untouched, like sanctuaries. One had come back home, finally, the other one would never come back.

In the middle of the night the doorbell rang, he was not sure he was supposed to open the door himself, but his parents were in their room, while Rantaro was still awake. He was not capable to stay put after everything that he discovered that day. He asked for the person’s identity through the closed door and quickly opened the door after hearing the answer.

A blond, tanned, tall girl in shorts smiled at him.

“Yo, it’s nice to see you again, little brother!”

Chapter End Notes

Next time on Present Side:
Did I already mention that I love angst? No? :P

Yukiko is from Persona 4, Futaba from Persona 5.
(Yes, I'm a Persona fan ^_^ )

By the way people! I'm preparing a little surprise for you all, it's nothing too big but maybe you'll like it!
I'll let you know when it's ready!
The silence was short lived.

Harukawa-chan, cold as always, had already recovered from Gonta’s execution, if she even was affected at all. She immediately went for the only thing she cared about.

“Hey, tell us now, what’s the secret of the outside world? If we don’t know that we won’t be able to accept this.”

“Kokichi!” there was Momota-chan. “If you really cared for Gonta, explain yourself to everyone and-“

“I don’t want to.” he forced those words out of his mouth, desperately trying to hit the reset button of his emotions and be able to continue his plan.

If he were going to fall apart now, all of it would be ruined. Too soon, they recovered way too soon.

‘I’m not ready yet, I need a moment, I’m not ready-ImnotreadyImnotreadyImnotready’

“You what?!” Momota-chan raised his fist, ready to punch him.

Kokichi tried to forcibly push the button but he ended up breaking it instead. What came out of his mouth was a long string of shouted insults. He fixed his gaze on Momota-chan’s eyes, he was easy to insult. He could not hold himself together if he was to accidentally look into the Magician’s eyes, or even worse the eyes of the-person-that-shall-not-be-named.

“I said that I don’t want to, you stupid imbecile! Have you become deaf or something?! Don’t tell me you actually fell for that fake crying?! Why in the world would I ever cry for Gonta?! WHO CARES ABOUT THAT IDIOT!! God, you’re so stupid! So incredibly stupid! How come you’re not dead yet?! Idiots like you are the ones that make this game so interesting! What secret of the outside world and shit, clearly that was all a lie! I can’t believe that he actually fell for that, that gigantic moron!” he started laughing maniacally.

‘Enough, Kokichi, this is enough.’

“Hell, he surely spiced up the game, didn’t he?! And all of you, what are those faces?! Why have you gotten attached to him in this place?! You are all just as stupid! This is a game of suspicion and betrayal! I’m enjoying it so much! Didn’t all those stupid faces he was making make you want to laugh?! C’mon laugh!”

‘Stop. Enough is enough.’

“Don’t you know that there are people in this world that spread grieve and misery for no other reason than the thrill of it! I’m one of those people! The more you all suffer the more I’m enjoying it! Nothing pleases me more than seeing you all drown in pain and suffering!”

“So basically…” Harukawa-chan, uncaring of everything as always. “You sacrificed Gonta and Miu for your own entertainment?”
“So what?” he laughed. “You kill for money, don’t try to lecture me!” he sent them an evil grin. “But man, you should have suspected me more! Because of you, Iruma-chan and Gonta died such meaningless deaths!”

“Meaningless deaths?!” Momota-chan tried to punch him but Kokichi was ready.

Using his speed to his advantage, he punched the Astronaut in the stomach making him double over, from his lips spilled blood.

“Oh! Sorry, didn’t mean to hurt you so much!” he smiled widely. “Or maybe, you are simply hiding something from your friends too?”

“You fucking bastard!” the glare he sent him was of pure hate. Good.

The others immediately surrounded Momota-chan and showered him with questions.

“Hm? Why are you all so panicked over a guy like him? He is completely useless! He has yet to do a single useful thing and-“

“Yeah, because you have done so many useful things already, right?!” Saihara-chan turned to face him shouting. “You only make things more miserable and-“ Kokichi interrupted him, his rage not completely subdued yet perking up again strongly.

“OH DON’T EVEN TRY!” it came out a lot more forceful than necessary. “You all complain day in and day out about the situation and everything but NONE OF YOU EVER MOVE HIS ASS! I have yet to see any of you do anything different than follow blindly the path that Monokuma shows you! You sleep without a care in the world!”

“Don’t you dare say that I sleep without a care in the world! DON’T YOU DARE!” Saihara-chan reacted just as strongly.

“Shuichi, move.” Harukawa-chan ordered from behind him pulling out a knife from her skirt. “I’m going to kill him.”

Momota-chan started to protest but Monokuma’s voice overwhelmed him.

“Wow, there! I appreciate a lively spirit but a murder in the courtroom is just a no go!”

‘Yeah, of course, the fucking audience would get fucking displeased, right?!’

He turned around and started to make his way to the elevator.

“Enough, I’m bored of this already, you are all extremely boring, I’ll win this game all by myself, goodbye!”

He rode the elevator alone while the others returned to fussing over Momota-chan.

‘Good luck with your lie, Astronaut.’

Once the elevator doors were closed and he was engulfed in silence, his breath started to get ragged and his body was shivering slightly. It was like he was in shock. He tried to take a deep breath but failed so he decided not to breathe at all. He could not show the audience just how badly this was affecting him. They had to be caught in his trap, at least a bit. It took him some time, the elevator ride was almost over, but he finally could muster a grin on his face. He looked up wearing that grin.

‘Look at me audience, look how satisfied I am!’
After the elevator doors opened, he sprinted outside and ran all the way to his dorm room. He had a feeling that Saihara-chan was not going to let this go. Before this trial, he was sure that the Detective would have wanted nothing to do with him afterward, but now he had a clear feeling that he would never let go. He was going to hunt him down until he obtained what he wanted. Kokichi was not sure if what he wanted was an explanation or a couple of broken bones.

He stormed into his room and gathered the few things he needed, a change of clothes and the Bugvacuum. He was going to hide inside his Lab. The monitors inside would help him understand when the right moment to strike with the ‘revelation of the outside world’ was. In the meantime, he needed to wait for the poll results. A day, maybe two, he figured. Just in case, he was going to stock some food inside his Lab. Maybe the poll would end in four or five days, it was difficult to estimate time inside the Neo World Program. He absolutely needed the prize; his plan was destined to fail otherwise. When he left his room he was about to close the door but decided against it, he had nothing to hide and seeing the room empty would make them go crazy with doubt. He was about to enter the building when he saw Saihara-chan, alone, climbing the stairs that led to the lower part of the garden. Kokichi sprinted once again, fright in his heart, and hid inside his Lab. He dropped the stuff in a corner and considered the situation. He needed food. Logically speaking, now was the best time, since it was almost nighttime. If it was any later, it would count as a violation of the rules, he was sure the Bugvacuum would not fool the programmers of the Neo World Program. That thing could be used to fool the audience, not Monokuma. Going into the dining room during the day was one of the worst ideas ever. No, he needed to go now.

He gathered his courage, which was not much, truth to be told, and ran as fast as he could. Hopefully, Saihara-chan was occupied with his dorm room now and was not searching for him inside. He stuffed two plastic bags with everything that could be eaten cold, as fast as possible and then ran out, trying to reach his Lab again. Trying being the keyword. Saihara-chan’s eyes fixed on him. He looked everything besides happy, he observed the bags for a moment.

“Hiding? Running away?” his voice was cold. “For someone who is doing useful stuff, you sure love to run away from problems and avoid taking responsibility.”

Okay, Kokichi could accept a lot of insults. He deserved them all, but avoiding taking responsibility was that one thing he could not accept no matter what.

“You don’t get to tell me that!” he shouted at him. “Taking responsibility is that one thing I never stop doing, never! I’m taking responsibility for everything, always, for all of you! If you really want to blame someone for all this, look no further than yourself! It’s your own fault you are here in the first place!”

Kokichi realized he said too much when the look of anger on the Detective’s face was replaced by a look of confusion.

“What?”

‘Abort mission. Abort mission, NOW!’

Kokichi had no better idea than to run away again. He was sure that saying ‘it’s a lie!’ would not work very well there.

‘Great, now I need a new place to hide.’
Next time Somewhere:
Family love and other kinds of love.

As you can see this dialogue went differently. In canon Shuichi was not particularly attached to Kokichi so it was easier for him to say 'You'll always be alone'. But this Shuichi wants to forgive Kokichi but at the same time he is angry at him... He won't leave Kokichi alone, nope.

Have you noticed? This work is now part of a series!
The other work is simply a short version of this story on Shuichi's POV!
I'll release the second chapter on my birthday, the 29th!
In the morning light, his sister looked radiant.

She was a beautiful twenty-year-old girl. She was bright, smart, funny and lively. Everything Rantaro always loved about his little sisters. Now he knew why all of them were wonderful blond girls with a happy personality. She was only one person, but she was worth the ten in his head. She never stopped talking for a moment; she told him all about her job, all about her house, her friends and even her boyfriend. Their parents seem to be used to it as they were easily keeping up with the ridiculous amount of information she was going through in an hour. Rantaro learned many completely random facts about her, like she had a dog, her favorite dessert was fruit parfait and her boyfriend was a muscular lifeguard. He was quite overwhelmed, but it was not a bad sensation, he liked talkative people.

They all went together, as a family again, to eat sushi and then Yukiko wanted to visit Futaba’s grave. Once they were back home, she started asking him about his memories and new life. Rantaro described his apartment, his friends and his intention with the Danganronpa show. He was a bit worried that his parents would disapprove of him going against a big corporation like Danganronpa, but they only told him to be careful. As long as he was safe, they would accept his decision. After dinner, Yukiko and he sat on the sofa and waited for Danganronpa to start.

“Sooo…” she smiled with mischief. “The blond girl is pretty cute, isn’t she? Akamatsu Kaede, I think that was her name?”

“Not you too!” he yelled. “Why is everyone trying to make me pursue a relationship with her?!”

She laughed loudly.

“Well, maybe it’s because you two have good chemistry?” she wiped the corner of her eye. “I mean, you don’t have to start a relationship with her if you don’t want to. It’s just that I’ve never seen you have any interest in a girl before, so I got excited when I saw an opportunity for you, that’s all. I don’t want you to spend the rest of your life as my future children’s babysitter!”

“What makes you think that I would want to work as a babysitter for you?” he asked trying to look unimpressed.

“Oh c’mon, you totally would!” she laughed again. “You are that kind of person!”

Rantaro didn’t know if he was feeling flattered or not, but she was right. He would love to become an uncle and play with her sister’s children all day. Maybe he really needed a girlfriend after all… He hated loneliness.

Danganronpa started and she offered him a big bowl of popcorn and a carbonated drink. He refused and she shrugged. She sat with her legs spread and sat the bowl right in between. Rantaro chuckled, his sister was a really sassy person, but he liked sassy people. They showed Monokuma trying to give another flashback light to Angie, Rantaro was perplexed about that. Then the girl broke the flashback light and declared that she would bring Rantaro back from the dead. He felt his sister stare, but she waited until the show went back to the studio for a discussion before speaking.

“Are you going back in?” her tone was neutral.
“Yes. I have to save Leader. He is my little brother,” he answered matching her tone.

She stared at him for a moment, before grabbing him by the neck and start to ruffle his hair strongly.

“Geez! You are hopeless! You haven’t changed one bit!” she smirked. “Go and save the little princess in distress!”

“Kokichi surely would not take well being called a princess in distress but sure… as you say,” he shrugged.

Then the show went back to the Neo World Program and showed Kokichi was talking to Shuichi. He was telling him about some anime that featured a killing game. Rantaro caught his breath; Kokichi was so close to the truth already. It took Nagito to reach the fourth phase before he started to say crazy things; Kokichi was already reaching the right conclusion. Rantaro was not sure it was a good thing. Did this mean that he was getting close to the point where he would lose himself?

Rantaro was glad that Angie was going to bring him back soon. He wondered how much time she needed, this had happened inside the Program some time ago, possibly even a whole day. He frantically searched for his phone. No new calls. He supposed it was not the right time yet, but maybe he should go back to his apartment as soon as possible. Oblivious to his train of thought, his sister spoke.

“The kid is a quick thinker.” she had her mouth full of popcorn. “I think he is the first one to reach the truth in the third phase. He actually uses his brain. They will kill him soon enough.”

Rantaro’s heart sank. Maybe it was a good thing for him to die and come back but…

“Why you say that?”

“Because they would never allow someone that is spreading hints about the truth to everyone to get far in the game. Remember Mikan and Nagito? They always find a way to make them leave or end the season. Furthermore, he is far into his second season, his body would suffer damage if he were to stay much longer. I’m sure they are going to use that as an excuse to kill him off in the next phase. He will be the fourth kill, wanna bet?” she looked unimpressed about Danganronpa’s modus operandi.

“There is no hope for him to survive the fourth phase?” he was not sure she had a response, but he tried anyway.

“Hmmmm…” she thought for a moment. “If he wins the popularity poll for a straight week, they can’t kill him without a good reason. The audience would throw a tantrum.”

Suddenly his phone rang. He picked up instantly after seeing who it was.

“Amami-kun?” Hinata-san’s serious voice was on the other end. “Can you come by Ryota’s office tomorrow?”

He immediately agreed, feeling a little guilty about leaving his family without any warning. His sister nodded without saying anything, she had clearly eavesdropped on the conversation. She called him a taxi and then went to inform their parents. They wished him all the best possible and he could read their eyes that they were hoping to see him again as soon as possible. The trip back to the city took four hours. Rantaro was really tired when he finally hit the bed and went immediately into a deep sleep.

He was woken up by the doorbell; his friends were waiting for him to join them. Rantaro had a bad feeling. Since they were involved too… It could not be about the Necronomicon. Before leaving the
complex, Rantaro knocked on Kaede’s door. He invited her to come meet Ryota and Hinata-san with them and she gratefully accepted. Kazuichi sent them a smirk, but Rantaro elbowed his side to make him stop.

Inside Ryota’s office, Kaede introduced herself to him and he did the same. Byakuya and Chiaki joined them. Hinata-san was not present though.

“Hajime needs to work out the investigation and the trial with the other story writers, he sends his regards.” Chiaki answered the unspoken question.

“Wait, you mean that a murder has happened?” Sonia placed her hands to her mouth, Gundham rested a hand on her shoulder.

“Yes,” Ryota answered this time, “Yonaga-san is dead and has awoken in the hospital five hours ago. The killer is Shinguji-san.”

Rantaro selfishly sighed with relief when he realized that Leader was safe once again. Then it hit him.

“What about the Necronomicon?!”

“Yeah, that’s the problem…” Ryota frowned. “Shirogane-san has completely been two steps ahead of us this time. She seemed accepting of Hajime’s idea, but in actuality, she never intended to let any of you return inside the game. She caught onto the fact that it would work against her. She purposely led Yonaga-san to her death inside the middle empty room, while Shinguji-san was preparing a murder scene. Shinguji-san’s target had not been chosen yet, but Shirogane made sure it would be her so that the whole resurrecting ritual is now canceled. I’m sorry, I could not do anything to help.” he looked depressed.

“It’s not your fault.” he reassured him. “She just didn’t want me in. Angie said she would resurrect me so she immediately took action. She has a grudge against me, I’m sure. There is really no way to make this work?”

“No, it’s been decided that the Necronomicon was only for the third phase. Now it will only be a piece of evidence for the murder case and nothing else. I’m sorry.” Ryota hung his head.

“Can you show us the murder, please, Mitarai-san?” politely asked Kaede.

There really was not much to show, it was mostly an accident. Angie left her Lab in search of a candle in one of the empty room and stumbled upon Korekiyo preparing some kind of trap with a floorboard. He struck her from behind with said floorboard and then carried her back to her Lab. The Anthropologist hung some strange wax effigies upside-down, killed Angie with the katana that was his own Lab and then closed the door using Kaede’s effigy and the katana. Kaede said ‘Ow’ when he struck the katana in her effigy making everyone jump in surprise.

“Do you think he chose me because of my boobs?” she joked.

After a moment of astonished silence, everyone started to laugh. Having reduced the tension, she smiled satisfied. They returned to the apartment complex shortly after and Rantaro reflected for a long time about what just happened. He was happy that he didn’t have to return to the Neo World Program, but he was extremely disappointed too. He really wanted to help Leader and not just by ridiculing the game from outside. Shirogane knew how to play the game, no doubt.

Bad dreams hunted his sleep, he dreamed of being inside a glass tank. He was in one of the hallways of the fourth floor of the Academy. He was knocking as hard as he could on the glass, but no one
could see or hear him. Shuichi, Kaito, Maki and Kiibo passed by, but no one even looked in his direction. Kokichi appeared, he had a golden katana stuck in his chest; blood was dripping slowly dirtying his white jacket. Not even he noticed.

Praying to some deity, possibly not Atua, he asked to stop having such disturbing nightmares. He decided to visit Angie; he was not sure that it would be of any help, but he was going to try anyway. During the trip, he reflected on the fact that the 52nd cast was much more united than the 53rd. The merits were Chiaki’s and Kokichi’s without a doubt. The girl greeted him like they had seen each other only the other day. She was still devoted as always, she was not moving away an inch from her ‘Atua’ belief.

“Atua’s will works in mysterious ways! I’ve been reincarnated myself! Or is this paradise?"

“Didn’t they explain to you? About the Neo World Program?” he was confused.

“Sure they did! I’ve been elevated to a new plan of existence! I must have achieved the platinum partnership earlier than expected!” she started humming something.

“Ehm… I’m glad you are in high spirit…” he had no idea what to do about her, really. “So, do you intend to accept the interview with Shirogane?”

“Tsumugi? Is she dead as well? I must pray for her then!” she joined her hands in prayer.

“N-no? She is the mastermind?” he pulled out his phone and discretely started to type a text message to Kaede.

“Oh, really? Is the mastermind a divine being? Can she travel between dimensions?” she looked at him curiously.

Rantaro pushed ‘send’ on his phone and smiled awkwardly. He listened to her humming in silence for a long time, hoping that Kaede would read his message soon. Suddenly the door opened and his savior appeared.

“Hi, Angie. How are you feeling?” Kaede asked her with a smile.

“Wow, paradise is more crowded than I thought!” was her reaction.

Rantaro started to massage his eyes while Kaede sat next to her bed and explained to her everything once again. Angie was nodding every now and then but the more time passed, the more Rantaro was sure she was not registering a single word. She was completely useless.

Kaede, once they were out of the hospital, sent him an apologetic look for not being able to help. He shook his head; there was nothing that could’ve been done there. She was a lost cause in every ‘dimension’ she was. At the very least, she was happy, that was already something. He invited Kaede to watch Danganronpa with him that evening. They ate in a restaurant close by and then came back to sit on his sofa like some many times before.

The show was pretty boring now that they knew who was going to die next. Or at least it was until suddenly they saw a disclaimer on the screen, something about adult content. Before they could process why that appeared, they were looking at a strange pink room with a big bed and a rotating horse. Inside were Kokichi and Miu.

“Since we are childhood friend you get the scoop first! Ehm, sooo… You can have your way with me… if you want…”
Rantaro and Kaede froze with their eyes wide open.

“I wanted to thank you and… what better reward for a man… But that’s just an excuse, what I really want is… your child.”

Kaede started coughing with a hand on her mouth.

“What’s wrong, you don’t want to be inside me? If you’re not gonna use that dick of your now, then when?! You know what? Fuck that! C’mere, I’m gonna squeeze every last drop out of you!”

They watched as Kokichi fled the room as if his life was depending on it. They looked at each other, red as tomatoes, and then started laughing so hard they were reduced into tears.

“Poor Leader! That must have been traumatic!”

Chapter End Notes

Next time on Present Side:
One last exploration of the Academy.
Kokichi was seated on the dusty floor below the wooden floor of the same empty room where he had hit his head.

It was not a happy choice, but it was the first place that came to his mind. He replaced the floorboard in its original position, so he was seated in complete darkness. He seriously doubted that Saihara-chan was going to remove the floorboards to search for him. He surely was going to check room-by-room, starting from the lower floors and making his way up. That’s what a Detective would do. Fake or not, they implanted this personality in him, so it was pretty safe to bet on it. Kokichi would wait until he would climb to the fifth floor and then run back to his Lab. He ate a snack while waiting, it was past dinnertime already. He remembered that he had skipped breakfast that morning; it seemed like a lifetime ago. This day just kept dragging on and on. He wanted to be in a safe place and rest as soon as possible. The tears and screams before had left him thirsty and drained. He was still cold too. A cup of hot chocolate sounded like a dream right now.

“Kokichi? Kokichi, are you here?” there was Saihara-chan. “Don’t think you’ll be able to escape from me forever, I want an explanation!”

There was a moment of silence, and then he heard his steps going further down the hallway. Kokichi waited three more minutes to be safe and then he slowly climbed out, being careful not to make any noise. The bags were not that cooperative. He tiptoed down the stairs that led down to the third floor. His heart rate was double its normal speed until he was safely hidden inside his Lab. He was about to let out a sigh, but suddenly remembered his role, so instead, he transformed the sigh into a long laugh. It was probably really pitiful, laughing alone inside a secret hideout, it was terribly clichéd. He stored the food on the shelves nearby, knocking down the masks and wigs that were exposed there. Unfortunately, the only place where he could sleep was the back seat of the extravagant car. He forgot to bring a sheet and he would have to sleep in there for who knows how many days. Off to a great start, really.

He observed the monitors for some time, just to pass the time. No one entered the building after Saihara-chan and he was still searching around for him. He felt guilty for this too; Saihara-chan was going to be really disappointed and angry after hours spent without getting any result. This was his entire fault, and not only in the obvious sense, it was his fault because he had the terrible idea of letting him get close before all this. If he had just kept him at a distance, like he had done with all the others, none of this would have ever happened. Right now, he would just be sad for Gonta and hate him, not running around in a circle trying to get useless answers out of him. Kokichi knew why he was doing this. Saihara-chan, for an inexplicable reason, decided to trust him and now that his trust had been broken, he wanted something to compensate the hurt in his heart. It was not necessarily an answer that he needed, an admission of guilt or an apology would probably work too, considering the type of person he was. Normally he would be happy, in a twisted way, of having proved to him that trusting others was not a good idea, but right now, he could not feel this way anymore. What he had done was beyond a simple betrayal of trust. Even in the case that the two of them had never had any relation at all, his actions were still despicable, horrible, and disgusting. It was much similar to the situation with Shinguji, Kokichi never trusted him, but his double murder was still shit. The irony. Kokichi had thought ‘what reason can have a person to kill two times here?’ and now he had killed two times. He was worse than Shinguji.
He started to laugh, and laugh, and laugh. The audience would probably start to think that he was going crazy soon enough, but he really didn’t give a damn. His reputation was beyond saving anyway. He wanted to avoid jail, so he would not actually try to attack Danganronpa directly, but he didn’t need a social life outside the Neo World Program either. Even his old friends from season 52 probably already hated him, so what was the point really? Once he was outside, he would figure something out, he was good at pulling solutions out of his ass after all. One could even say that this was his actual talent. Maybe he could emigrate to Antarctica.

He tried to sleep inside the car only after Saihara-chan abandoned his futile effort. The bare minimum he could do for him was to at least stay awake as long as him. The look of defeat on his face hunted Kokichi’s mind and he could not sleep at all. Part of Kokichi’s mind was glad, he was sure he would have dreamed of Gonta, Iruma-chan or anyone really. By that point, anyone had the right to criticize him. If even Shinguji was better than him, then he really was at the bottom of the spectrum. ‘This is a world full of jests’ as the Anthropologist used to say. The next morning he sat up feeling ill, both physically and mentally. His body ached everywhere after lying down in that awkward position. The faces of the others in the dining room were pretty bad too. Well, excluding Kiibo’s and Harukawa-chan’s. Kiibo was a robot, so he was excused, but Harukawa-chan was just the coldest human being alive, end of the story.

Monokuma appeared and gave the prizes, as usual. Kokichi could see the effect of his own meddling right there. Momota-chan was refusing to meet Saihara-chan’s eyes even for a moment. Surprisingly, or maybe not, Saihara-chan looked more mad than sad or disappointed. Kokichi had the strange impression that Saihara-chan’s patience had reached its limit and he had become unforgiving of immature acts like this one. Seeing Saihara-chan grow was always a pleasure, even if he didn’t really deserve praise for this. Luckily, this was not in the way of his plan, if Saihara-chan had gotten more capable of leading people, it could had, but him being insufferable about others was not a bad thing. He took the junk like usual, they were two keys. One looked made of stone, surely it was to open Rantaro’s Lab, the big stone door next to Saihara-chan’s Lab. It was the only other Lab besides Momota-chan’s, which was still missing. Kokichi was a bit curious, what would a Survivor Lab look like? Rantaro’s Survivor Perk was probably inside too… He was sure it could not contain anything useful to end Danganronpa, but maybe it would be better if the others didn’t see it either. Maybe he had mentioned something and Saihara-chan was quick on the intake. The other key was black and white, there was a door with a checkered design next to the Magician Lab, it looked just like his scarf. The others must have exchanged it for the entrance to his Lab, he was sure. The designers of the world had been so ‘kind’ to even offer him a camouflage. Saihara-chan went straight to that door. If he was hoping to find him beyond the door, he was in for another disappointment. He could not follow them inside since there were no cameras in the area. For a few minutes, he wondered what they had found inside, and then he felt like a complete idiot. The Map in his Monopad was being updated every time a new area was uncovered, even if he was not present. He opened the Map menu and discovered that inside, on top of a long spiral staircase, was the Astronaut Lab.

The Astronaut Lab.

Kokichi laughed his ass off, this time really amused. Those sick bastards had put *Momota-chan’s Lab* beyond a door that screamed ‘Kokichi is here!’ It was so hilarious that Kokichi’s side was hurting. Were fanfictions of him and Kaito being written perhaps? This *had* to be some kind of joke, there was no other way around it. Saihara-chan was the first one to appear in one of his cameras again, he was alone. Kokichi followed him up the stairs until he was visible in front of Rantaro’s Lab door. Now there could be no mistake, that had to be Rantaro’s Lab. Well, Saihara-chan could not know that his Lab had been open from the start, so maybe he thought that it was Kokichi’s. The door exploded much to his and Saihara-chan’s surprise and the bear appeared to tell him the lab was closed forever. Since the owner was already dead, they had not the permission to visit it. For a moment Kokichi thought it was logical, a cheap choice to keep them away from the
Survivor Perk. But then he thought about it some more. Why go through all the trouble to make the Lab an actual space if no one was allowed in, ever? The programmers had to work on it; it was not a matter of mere seconds to set up. While Saihara-chan was going back to the first floor again, Kokichi tried his best to think of a good reason. It required him to think back to season 52 to actually understand. They wanted to use the Survivor Perk as they had used Nagito’s file. It was the final clue to solve the whole game and close the season. Kokichi had to make sure no one was going to enter that Lab, ever. He needed the season to keep going for a long as possible.

In the next few hours that went by, nothing exciting occurred. Saihara-chan was exploring the building, but the black and white key was not opening anything else. But clearly it had to, it was still there, contrary to all of the previous prizes, which vanished as soon as they were used. One of Kokichi’s monitors was still off, so there had to be a area. After two hours, finally, something happened. Shirogane ran to Saihara-chan screaming something about a big door in the garden. The whole garden was the one place where Kokichi had not even a single camera so he was blind. A huge door in the garden, though? Sure, the Neo World Program allowed them to add whatever they wanted, but it wasn’t really realistic for them to find something like that out of the blue. Kokichi had a thought. A big one, which he wanted to confirm, right now.

He waited until all of them had left the building to explore this new place and then he ran outside as fast as he could. He completed the message on the stone, ‘This world is mine Kokichi Ouma’, and then he ran behind the dormitory to look around. The giant door was open and led into some kind big hanger. Not wanting to risk meeting Saihara-chan again, he ran back into his Lab. The last monitor was on, it showed a place that was very technological there was some kind of washing machine and a big thing that Kokichi’s mind recognized as an hydraulic press. Kokichi had never seen a hydraulic press in his whole life, not to mention the fact that his mind was clearly saying ‘hydraulic’. It was a press alright, but why specify? Clearly, this was another manipulation of the Neo World Program. They put particular memories in their mind to make sure they would use it. Probably to commit some murder. Killed with a hydraulic press, it did sound like a lot of fun. Clearly, Kiibo thought so too as he laid down inside the frigging press like it was nothing.

Kokichi jumped to his feet, horrified, as Saihara-chan pressed the button to make the press start.

‘What in the holy hell are you two doing!? ’

Petified in front of his screen, he watched with his mouth open as the press slowly descended until only the Robot’s arm was visible. He was about to scream, what, he had no idea, when Kiibo rolled out of the press. He let himself fall on the chair again, speechless. He just stared at the screen, as the two of them started to argue animatedly about something, Kokichi’s ears were not working too well at the moment. He opened his mouth again to scream some insults, but he thought better.

“Wow, I was so close to victory! Two fewer competitors! Why did you move out of the way Kiiboy?!”

Kokichi was not really sure it had been convincing, but it was the best he could do at the moment. Monokuma dropped out of the ceiling and gave Saihara-chan a remote control for the hangar shutter. Kokichi recognized this too, was an incentive to kill. Maybe the bear had waited until that moment because he was hoping Kiibo would be crushed. Suddenly Yumeno-chan appeared inside the hangar and said that everyone had to meet at the dining room. This could only be about the flashback light or his little prank in the courtyard. Eager to receive his answer, he mentally urged them to walk faster. When the two arrived, all the others were already present. Someone informed them on the new writing that had appeared on the stone.

Kokichi had no concrete proof. Maybe it was a coincidence. Maybe he was deluding himself.
However, if so, then why it felt so right? It made perfect sense. The audience surely was eager to see him in action again, it just made sense that someone would try to speed up the process. The door, the writing… It was only natural that someone would receive inputs from the programmers. Not only that, his instinct was literally screaming at him right now. His instinct had never betrayed him before, not even in this impossible world. He wanted to trust it now.

He now knew the identity of the mastermind.

Chapter End Notes

Next time Somewhere:
Rantaro visits an interesting place. A place only interesting people visit.

This is the last 'canon' chapter. Hope you are looking forward to the canon divergence! The 29th is my birthday and so I've decided to give a present to myself and everyone else! I'm going to post an extra chapter of this work and of Oasis that day! So you can expect a chapter of this one on the 28th the 29th and the 30th! Oasis on the 29th!
Keep it in mind!!

On a complete side note: I'm writing and posting a third story in a different fandom: Boku no Hero Academia. Pair: Izuku and Bakugou.
It's called the Price of a Quirk and it's an original story that doesn't follow the canon at all.
Just thought I could mention it in case anyone is into that fandom/pair as well!
Rantaro was walking toward the studio; he had left the apartment earlier than usual after deciding to breathe a bit of fresh air rather than traveling by taxi as usual. He was observing the different shops and buildings nearby; it was a very lively and luxurious area. Huge malls were aligned one after the other. Clothes stores, toys shops, libraries, restaurants and electronic stores. His eyes were caught by an enormous ‘Danganronpa’ sign over a mall entrance. Rantaro recalled Fuyuhiko mentioning something about fanart and fanfiction but what was this store? Danganronpa official merchandise? Rantaro stopped in front of the entrance unsure of what to do. He had an unhealthy curiosity. He wondered if merchandise of him and his friends existed. Probably.

Feeling like a child caught with his hands covered in chocolate, he went inside partially obscuring his face, which was already covered by his sunglasses. He looked through the shelves of merchandise, nearby were Monokuma’s plushies of every size and material, further down the aisle, there was even some Monomi plushies displayed. Reading a through the labels, he found out that Monomi was not a mascot exclusive for season 52 she already appeared in season 40, 46 and 49. The store also had a second floor. The first floor was completely made of black and white merchandise, like pins, clothes and accessories, or stuff with ‘Danganronpa’ written on it, while the second floor was divided into different sections. Rantaro saw a section for Danganronpa 50, 51, 52 and 53. He was really unsure if he wanted to enter any of the four. When he was about the leave the store entirely, a familiar voice called him.

“What a surprise seeing you here!” Nagito. “I didn’t think you liked this stuff!”

Rantaro cringed internally; he was definitely not a person he wanted to meet in this place.

“What are you doing here…?” he tried asking, regretting it immediately afterward.

“What a question! I’m buying Hajime goods, what else?” he smiled brightly like it was perfectly normal. “Since I can’t have the real deal, since Chiaki kinda stole him from me, I have to make it up with other stuff! I’ve already bought every object with his face on it, but today, they released a new version of his body pillow, I’m not going to miss that! And while I’m at it, I was checking to see if there’s any new fanart of him, these are a personal favorite of mine! Well, second only to the doujinshi people are drawing of the two of us, but that’s in another shop.”

Rantaro was not sure even where to start, but Nagito didn’t wait for him to decide. He grabbed his arm and dragged him into the season 51 section.

“Here! This is what I was looking for!” he grabbed the body pillow in question. Rantaro refused to look at it and his eyes searched for a safe spot to look. It not an easy task, the whole department was full of faces that were staring at him. “Ah, it’s very beautiful! The first one had his clothes still brand new, like they were at the start, but this version has the clothes half burned like towards the end! It’s way better!” he turned to look at him. “Do you want one too? I mean, I’ll be kind of jealous, but I can’t stop you!”

“Noon…?” why would he ever want a body pillow of Chiaki’s boyfriend?

“I see! Maybe one of Byakuya? Can’t say he will be thrilled about that, but don’t let that stop you! Ah, I mean, there are a lot of versions of body pillows of myself but… I won’t judge your taste, but
I don’t think you would want to have that trash in your house. Hajime sent back the one I bought for him so it’s surely garbage.”

“Neither, thanks…” he tried to not be offensive.

“Oh, but you are into girls, of course! My bad!” Nagito smiled brightly again then he started to drag him into the 52 section. “Hm, Kokichi has some pretty good ones but he’s not a girl so… Chiaki? Sonia?”

Rantaro covered his eyes before he could see anything, he really didn’t want to look at the body pillows of his friends who he considered like little brothers and sisters.

“Unless you want to buy one of yourself? That’s fine too. Ah, I know what you want!” suddenly Rantaro found himself dragged to the V3 section. “Unfortunately it’s not here yet! Kaede’s body pillow is still in preorder!” Rantaro blushed violently. “You see, they wait until a character is popular enough. For example, Ryoma won’t get one. For Kaede, it’s already been decided, it’s just not released yet! You can preorder one right now!”

“No, no, I’m good, thanks anyway.” Rantaro only wanted to run away.

“Oh, as you wish. Here, I’ll buy this for you!” with that Nagito reached for a keychain with a chibi Kaede on it and went to pay. Rantaro was unsure of what to do for a moment, then he hurried to his side to stop him. “Here!” Nagito shamelessly placed the keychain in his palm. “No need to thank me!” then he suddenly dropped a hand on Rantaro’s shoulder, dragging him outside the store. His hand was clutched so tightly on him that it almost hurt. Once outside he whispered in his ear. “Tomorrow at 3 pm, be at home.” it was almost like a threat.

Rantaro looked his back getting smaller and smaller as he was walking away until he was completely swallowed by people. He looked at the keychain for a moment before thinking...

“This store is terrible; we should burn it to ashes!’

But even as he was thinking that, his mind betrayed him.

‘I wonder if there are any fanart of her with that beautiful dress she wears in the studio, or even the cute white dress she has been wearing lately…”

He ran back to his apartment before he tempted himself into enter again. When he was opening the door, Kazuichi passed by and laughed his ass off after seeing the keychain. Rantaro wanted to punch him. The next day at three everyone started to gather inside his apartment, including Kaede. As it turned out Chiaki had called them all and since Nagito had already set up a meeting with him at that time, she just went with that. Fashionably late, Nagito, Chiaki and Hinata-san arrived together.

“I’m sorry to impose.” started speaking Hinata-san. “Since the Necronomicon backfired we thought it was best to meet in a more neutral area than my office. We suspect that someone saw you enter and reported it to Shirogane.” everyone started to murmur, but Hinata-san silenced them with a movement of his hand. Rantaro recognized that he had the ability to make other people listen, an ability people acquired in dire situations much like the killing game. “You needed to know that, as per tradition, the third phase is a double murder, this time beside Yonaga-san the other one to die was Chabashira-san. Both were killed by Shinguji-kun. Now that all the less popular characters had been eliminated, Shinguji-kun will surely follow shortly. We now enter the critical phase. Starting from the fourth phase the audience’s love is a very important factor, the course of the season will change depending on it. Starting from the end of the trial during the show, a portion of the screen will constantly show random messages selected from all of the different fan sites. From that point on, I
forbid you from posting anything online, they will surely catch us sooner or later, even Chiaki is not
infallible. Which means that these next days are absolutely crucial, please, post as much as you can,
try to change everyone’s opinion.”

“That’s quite all right,” answered Sonia with a light bow. “But what exactly do you need us to say?”

“I thought about it for a long time and-“ Nagito interrupted Hinata-san.

“No one in there, except for Kokichi, has any chance to destroy Danganronpa.” he deadpanned. “I
have studied them all, their personality and potential… None of them can. Kaito is the typical hero-
type; he can only make the audience more obsessed. The Assassin’s only potential is to kill the
Magician making herself pretty detestable, killing a defenseless victim, but that’s unlikely. If she
were to kill Kaito or Shuichi she would only make the audience more depraved with the whole
‘betrayal of a loved one’ stuff. Really, we want to avoid that at every cost. Himiko can only do good
on the show at this point, she is cute and adorable, or at the very least even if someone finds her
annoying she is not so detestable to make someone stop watching. No one cares about what Kiibo
does. Gonta won’t do anything useful at all. Miu, on the other hand, is a landmine, she will probably
explode somewhere down the line and take someone down with her. Shuichi is the heart of the
show, the little lost puppy. Unless he is secretly a murderous fiend, I doubt he will help us at all,
quite the opposite. Shirogane is counting on him to always carry the show just as Chiaki counted on
Kokichi for her season. Therefore, we can only count on Kokichi. I’m sure that sooner or later,
Shirogane will try to eliminate him, we need the audience to love him without a doubt. This way if
she does kill him off in some stupid way, the audience will be pissed and the longer he survives in
the game, the higher the possibility that he will remember something useful. It was the same with me
too. We can only count on him to realize what’s going on and ruin everything, I’m sure he can do it,
he is the one I appointed for that role from the beginning after all.”

Rantaro remembered, Nagito always was testing Leader, trying to push him to do better. Was Nagito
searching for someone who could destroy Danganronpa even then?

“So basically we have to make sure that Leader wins the next popularity polls, right?” Mahiru
summarized.

“Pretty much,” Nagito smiled, “now, who wants some cookies with tea?”

For some reason, they all went inside his kitchen without permission like they were in their own
home. Rantaro raised an eyebrow with a smile, but didn’t comment on it. He was left alone with
Hinata-san. Suddenly he remembered the store and Nagito’s fascination with body pillows.

‘Should I warn him?’

“Ehm… Hinata-san?” he caught his attention. “Were you aware that a manga is being sold about you
and Nagito?”

‘WHY DID I GO THERE IMMEDIATELY?’

Hinata-san’s eyes were wide open, and then he frowned.

“Did he…? Did Nagito say that to you? Did he do something weird?” he was not very happy.

“Yeah, he was buying your body pillow.”

Hinata-san started to massage his eyes.

“Not again… Don’t visit his apartment if you can help it. Seiko and I decided to give the monetary
prize to Nagito and Byakuya so they could buy their own apartment, but don’t enter his. It’s filled with stupid merchandise. He is doing it on purpose, he wants to annoy me to get his petty revenge…” he sighed. “For some reason, he was convinced that we were a thing and when he discovered that I was already in a relationship with Chiaki, he started sending me that stupid manga and his body pillow and…” he massaged his eyes once again. “Please ignore him.”

‘What kind of crazy relationship do those two have?!’

“They have their own apartments?” he tried to change the subject; he should have ignored everything after all.

“Yeah, none of us returned to our families. After what we went through… None of us feels comfortable returning to a ‘normal life’ filled with ‘normal people’. We just don’t fit.” he went silent for a bit. “Anyway. You already know Chiaki’s blog, right? Feel free to use it. But, personally, I feel like you are better in the studio than here at home writing comments. Your help is greatly appreciated.”

That night, for the first time, the studio was completely devoid of guests. Since Nagito was eating dinner in his living room, no one went, Shirogane looked visibly annoyed by the fact that she had to talk by herself the whole night. None of them paid any attention to her, as they were too busy discussing funny comments to post in order to create chaos online.

The next day, Rantaro and Kaede went together to speak with Tenko. Rantaro was pretty sure the Aikido Master would help them, after all, Himiko, the girl she liked, was still inside the game. Kaede once again had to do all of the explaining, even in the real world, Tenko was still talking about degenerate males and she had no intention of listen to him. She didn’t look particularly interested in helping Kokichi, as expected, but she immediately agreed once Himiko was brought up. Then she asked if they knew who had killed her and Kaede told her it had been Korekiyo. Rantaro had a headache by the time she had exhausted all the insults about degenerate males.

“My bad,” said Kaede with an apologetic smile once they were outside of the hospital. “I should have realized that telling her about him would make her go on about males for an eternity.”

“Nah, it’s fine. She would have found out eventually, it’s best if a friend told her instead of a stranger.” he smiled back.

Kaede offered him to buy him a hamburger as they ate together while planning for Tenko’s interview. It was clearly best if Kaede were to accompany her, and not him. Annoying the audience was one thing, but letting her ramble on national TV was downright cruel. Rantaro had to plan a strategy for the investigation and the trial, just like last time. He needed to see the clip of the second murder and trial as soon as possible.

It was still pretty early in the morning when Rantaro received a call from Kazuichi.

“Man, you have to come to Ryota’s office! You won’t believe this! That Korekiyo dude is straight up crazy!”

Chapter End Notes

Next time at Present Side:
Kokichi throws a bait at Shuichi. Will he be able to catch the fish?
Do you like my mega Danganronpa mall? :')
Nagito is definitely the person that would spend a lot of time in there just to annoy everyone xD
Contrary to Angie, Tenko really like Himiko so she won't abandon her.

Back to honorific:
Rantaro calls everyone with their first name except for people who, in his eyes, are adults and independent.
That's with everyone, even Ryota, are for him his little brothers and sister, but not Hinata-san. He looks like an adult and he doesn't need Rantaro's ultimate.
Now that we are clearing this, what about Ryota?
We know that Ryota is a polite guy, he calls everyone with the last name and -san, except for some people.
We can see why he calls Chiaki and Hajime by the first name, they are friends and allies since two years ago.
But there is a first name that doesn't really make sense, considering the timeline of events.
Who is that person and why?

Remember, new chapter tomorrow!
‘So, how should I use this knowledge?’

Kokichi had his feet on the control panel and he was staring at the ceiling leaning back in his seat.

Could he kidnap her and render her incapacitated to act? No, that was useless, she could just log out while he didn’t have that power. Not to mention the programmers, they would intervene. No, attacking her directly was the worst possible idea. Even trying to sneak around behind her back was useless, the programmers would probably inform her of everything. Basically, this information didn’t give him any advantage at all, great.

At the very least he now knew who not to look at in case another murder were to occur, it was impossible that a mastermind would be executed in a trial. Or maybe not? Maybe a mastermind would kill. Chiaki was a different story entirely, he had trusted her, but this mastermind was much more sneaky and unsympathetic. He realized now how the girl would always put herself in a corner, only commenting useless stuff. He always suspected her to be more intelligent than this, now he knew why.

Inside the dining room, the others were accusing him of having stolen the flashback light, like he wanted to have anything to do with that thing ever again. He had had enough of memory manipulation, thank you very much. The rest of the day was boring, his nervous tension was finally starting to lower so, soon after dinnertime, he hoped they would go to bed already so he could sleep as well. His eyes were closing on their own, that was just how tired he was. Saihara-chan, the stubborn fool, kept looking for him all evening. Kokichi finally fell asleep before the Detective could give up and go back to his room. He woke up feeling like a rheumatic old man, sleeping seated on a desk with your face pressed down on buttons was not exactly a restful way to sleep. His damn Lab didn’t even have a switch to turn off the lights. Lazy programmers, they were forgetting essential stuff.

Kokichi unwrapped some cookies while feeling extremely miserable. Snacks were good but not all day, every day. Not to mention the fact that he could not take a shower. These avatar bodies didn’t really sweat, he discovered it only after he had actually started to pay attention to the simulation, but still, the sensation of hot water was good on the skin. Kokichi could remember sweating while he was moving the cage for the séance but that was a collective effort toward an important plot point; surely, the programmers had been more careful for that moment. Casual daily activities weren’t worth the trouble to add sweat. It was probably a pain to program anyway, were they adding it drop by drop? At the very least, they had understood his need to stay in there as long as possible, discretely a toilet had appeared in a previously bare wall. It was hidden by a pile of boxes so they probably thought he would not have noticed that it was not there before. Kokichi’s memory, when left alone, was pretty good. His eyes too, there was no way he didn’t notice. He hadn’t commented on it, on the contrary, he had faked surprise. He really was grateful for the bathroom; no way was he going to risk it by sending them into paranoia.

He was just preparing one of the two plastic bags as an improvised trash can when the bear popped out in the center of the Lab. Kokichi slowed down his motions, faking complete calm and control of the situation. He was about to discover if his plan, which had required Gonta’s and Iruma-chan’s sacrifices to work, had succeeded.
“Puhuhu!” Monokuma was snickering with his paws on his mouth, mocking him. Of course, he was not going to make it easy. “The others are a bunch of idiots, aren’t they? After Gonta’s execution you were spouting the first things that came to mind, weren’t you? You were so pathetic! They didn’t even realize that you were collapsing into a million pieces! The audience could tell right away, they went crazy for you! Fan Clubs, blogs, even merchandise is being produced in this exact moment! Everyone here hates you, but don’t worry! You have an army of obsessed fans out there, I’m sure you can get anything you want in your life now! Oh, right… I almost forgot! What you wanted from life was to be able to show your true feelings and trust others! You wanted true friends! Aww, so cute! You are such a pitiful existence!”

Kokichi had never quite felt the need to kill before. Hurt, sure, but not kill. Now he really wanted to kill the bastard that was writing the lines this thing was saying. He was not going to kill anyone, of course not, but once he was out of here, he was going to find the fucker that was messing with him and he would make him pay.

“Wow, kid! You sure can make some scary faces!” the bear laughed again. “I think you should keep them for your friends out there. I’m sure they would appreciate them!”

“Can I ask for my prize now or not?” Kokichi asked trying to put his mask back into place.

“So impatient! It’s not like you have a lot of things to do down here, right? You can spend a moment talking to your beloved headmaster!” Monokuma was playing cat and mouse with him.

“Sure!” the only way out of this situation was to play along; the more he would struggle, the harder Monokuma would hit him back. “For example, you can tell me why you have not given them a flashback light yet! Why is that?”

“Oh, you curious about that?!” his tone was enthusiastic, but it was only a ruse. “It’s about time we reveal the post-apocalyptic setting. After all you staged a perfect path to it! The flashback light is not really needed right now, we will use it later.”

“I see! Well, you should give me my prize, I’m going to help with that, you see?!” it was kind of true. “When I saw that scene I had a flash of inspiration!”

The bear thought deeply for a couple minutes, surely the programmers were discussing furiously if it was a good idea to trust him or not.

“I see, I see! Well, then. Care to say what this prize is supposed to be?” he finally asked.

“Give me total control over the Exisals for 24 hours. A day. I won’t ask for anything else.” he had all he needed besides them.

“Aren’t you a little crafty bastard?! What a cute idea you had there! I don’t see any problem with this, as long as you don’t just kill everyone with them, to be sure I’m gonna disarm all the weapons, you cool with that?” Monokuma tilted his head.

“Sure, that’s not my plan at all. I don’t need the weapons.” he shrugged. “I’ll call you when I want to start using the prize.”

“Puhuhu! It’s nice to do business with you, please come again soon!” he jumped away through a wall.

Kokichi, determinated to do this as soon as possible, studied the atmosphere inside the dining room that morning. They were all still pretty divided, Saihara-chan was eating alone with a frown, Yumeno-chan, Shirogane-chan and Kiibo were eating in silence all close to each other as if they
wanted to shield themselves using the others, Harukawa-chan and Momota-chan were nowhere to be seen. Kokichi was just putting together all the pieces he had left out the bigger picture to be prepared for every situation when the two made their entrance inside the room. Kokichi heard Momota-chan from his monitor.

- I need you all to trust me, we need to fight now, when we still can, I don’t have much time left… -

Kokichi frowned, this was both good and bad. It was helping his plan for the immediate future, but it could be a problem later down the line. Right now, Momota-chan was in a vulnerable state and it would be easy to manipulate him into trying the underground tunnel again, but later, when Kokichi needed them all to just stay put and ruin the show, his illness would become a reason for him to act while ignoring all the rest. Kokichi added another little piece to his puzzle.

He had to act now, it was the perfect time. Momota-chan told them to meet him in the gym the following morning. That would be the day. He just needed a way to make sure the objects were delivered in the right place at the right time. He could do it personally but… Momota-chan and Harukawa-chan left the dining room without even try to include Saihara-chan who made no attempt to join them. The Detective calmly got up and put his dish in the sink, a dish the programmers would just make disappear later, then he left the room and started his search through the entire school again. He could deliver the objects personally but there was another possibility. It was pretty bold, maybe too bold, but it could serve another purpose too. It could finally discourage the Detective from his masochistic attempt.

He needed to choose a good place to confront him, if he had to run away all the time, the discussion would have some problems. He reviewed the entire map, and when his eyes fell on a particular place, he wondered if he had enough courage to pull it off. It wasn’t like he had much of a choice either. But it was such a stupid plan! Iruma-chan’s level of stupid. It was never going to work, no way. At least, it was a safe plan. He could try it.

He slipped out of his Lab as discretely as possible and reached the warehouse where he found what he needed: fishing line. Then, still as discretely as possible, he reached the chosen place and confirmed some details. After preparing what he needed, he wrote a little message for the Detective and sneaked around carefully until he was in front of the dormitory. He slid the paper under Saihara-chan’s door and peeked inside his own. There were clear signs of someone searching through it. Kokichi shrugged, uninterested, then positioned himself in the special place he had chosen, waiting.

He had to wait until the late afternoon; the Detective had probably decided to give up for the moment since it was right before dinner. When Saihara-chan entered the room, attracted by his little message, Kokichi’s heart skipped a beat. The Detective’s eyes fixed on his when he step fully inside the room, he frowned deeply.

“What are you doing in th—”

Kokichi didn’t waste a second, he pulled the fishing line as hard as he could and the door behind the Detective closed with a satisfactory metallic sound. Saihara-chan jumped, scared and stared at the door, then at him, then at the door again. He tried to open it without any success. He turned to face him with a shocked expression.

“You… are you completely nuts? Why am I locked inside Hoshi-kun’s shower room while you are locked inside his shower stall? What’s your problem?”

Kokichi laughed like a complete imbecile until he was reduced to tears.

‘I was SOOOOO sure this would not work, I was sooo sure he would sense the trap! OMG!’
Saihara-chan was still staring at him with his mouth open, complete disbelief filling his face.

“I’ve caught you, Saihara-chan!” he yelled, feeling like the silliest person alive.

“No, I’m pretty sure you’ve caught yourself! Why are you locked in there?! Why did you lock the door?! A fishing line?! What kind of person comes up with something like this?!“ Saihara-chan was shaking his head.

“Yeah, this is pretty kinky, huh?” he had no idea where that had come from, his brain was malfunctioning right now.

Saihara-chan face-palmed.

“Kokichi. What are we doing here, locked inside a room with a grate separating us?” he tried to sound reasonable, failing miserably. “If you don’t tell me, I’m going to start screaming for help.”

“Scream as much as you want! This place is a simulation of a prison! It’s soundproof!” he regained his composure and put his hands behind his head, a gesture he had not done in quite a while. “As for why: we are here to talk. I have something to tell you and I need you to listen to me, but at the same time, I don’t fancy getting captured by you or punched even, so I’m staying here, in a safe spot. I’ve created a perfect parity situation!”

“How is this a parity situation at all?!” he was still flustered.

“Easy! You cannot leave this room unless I give you the key, since it’s a prison it doesn’t open from the inside without a key. Which means that you cannot leave without agreeing to my terms. On the other hand, I cannot leave this stall unless you give me the key to the lock, which is on the sink, in case you haven’t notice.” he pointed at it. “So we need to be in agreement here! We can both leave only after we both decide to cooperate, how does that sound?”

Saihara-chan looked away, uncomfortable.

“Will you listen to what I have to say, Saihara-chan?”

Chapter End Notes

Next time Somewhere:
The third phase (fast forward version).

Just reminding you that I'll post a chapter of Oasis today and Somewhere tomorrow!
Rantaro, Gundham and Sonia were in Rantaro’s kitchen, taking the mandatory afternoon tea break that Sonia loved. Rantaro had thought long and hard about who to invite to comment on Tenko’s death during the séance with him. Gundham had the most ‘experience’ with rituals and sorcery, he was definitely the right person. Hinata-san had sent them the video of the whole sequence plus a little segment of the trial to watch so they could prepare. Apparently, Hinata-san now trusted him with the same material he was previously only trusting Nagito with. He sent them a message that Korekiyo would wake up during the night. Rantaro had watched part of the second murder alone on his TV and then stopped the video so he could watch it again with the selected person. Gundham had been the obvious choice.

“I see…” Gundham closed his eyes giving himself importance. “You wish to borrow my knowledge…” he went silent and Rantaro waited, not sure of what was happening. He was good with people, but Gundham was outside his area of expertise, he was not a kid he could play along with, but at the same time, he was. Gundham was so confusing. “Agreed. I’ll form this contract with you. Now sign using your True Name!”

Rantaro wanted to say that there was no contract to sign anywhere, but an encouraging look from Sonia made him swallow his words. He took the first piece of paper he could find, a piece of absorbent paper, and a pen. He hesitated for a moment, unsure of what he actually wanted him to write, then he just wrote ‘Fukawa Ryoji’. This was a pretty decent ‘True Name’, right? He saw Sonia hid a smile as she surely recognized his birth name. Gundham instead nodded solemnly. He then took the pen himself and wrote ‘Okabe Kyouma’ below his name. Rantaro could feel that this was actually Gundham’s birth name. He nodded in response. Gundham got up and burned the piece of paper on the stove.

“Here, now the contract is sealed! Our souls will be consumed by demons, if we break the pact!”

“I see, well then, it’s best if we start preparing and watch the murder, right?”

They rewatched the video of the investigation; Gundham was staring at the screen with his arms crossed and a frown in complete silence. He looked extremely displeased, but Rantaro knew that it was simply his resting face and pose. When they saw Kokichi hit his head on the floorboard they jolted closer to the TV as if they could enter it and help him up. They had to suffer in silence as they waited for him to regain consciousness and get back up. They observed him wobble in the hallway and then just lay down on his stomach on the floor. Sonia actually called Chiaki and asked her if he was alright, his real body, of course. Even after Chiaki’s assurance, they couldn’t calm down. When Shuichi and Maki pretty much ignored his head wound Sonia spoke up, indignantly.

“He is wounded, why isn’t anybody helping him?! I would expect more from a Lady and a Detective!”

Rantaro was not sure that Maki would appreciate being called a Lady, but he still agreed with her. Kokichi was hated, that was evident, but still it was sad to see them ignore his injury like this. He really wished Korekiyo had waited a bit longer before killing Angie. He would have helped Leader, no questions asked. The recording ended halfway through the trial.
“Do you have a plan, Gundham?” he asked.

“Leave it to me.” he got on his feet with his arms still crossed. Then he made his way to the door to leave the apartment. Rantaro called him back, but he just repeated himself. “Leave it to me.”

When the door opened, Sonia got on her feet gracefully and followed him outside.

“Leave it to him,” that was her goodbye while she closed the door.

Rantaro scratched his head; those two were too similar already.

“All right, I’ll leave it to you, I guess.”

In the clothing department, Gundham personally chose the most extravagant outfit he could get his hands on. He wore a black leather suit with metallic accessories; he wrapped multiple white scarves with a string of red kanji in the center all over himself. He looked like a vocalist for a rock band that had fused together with a mummy. Rantaro had no idea of what he was trying to go for, but the result was pretty hilarious already. Maybe he could distract the audience from the investigation dressed like this.

Shirogane introduced him with enthusiasm and the audience exploded in a long applause. Gundham was a fan favorite all right. Even in the confusion, Rantaro could hear comments about his choice of clothes, luckily Gundham didn’t know the meaning of the word shame.

“So, Gundham, it’s nice to-“ she was immediately interrupted.

“It’s Overlord of Ice.” Gundham’s voice was severe.

“Yes, Overlord of Ice, it’s nice-“

“To you, it’s Supreme Overlord of Ice.”

“Ehm… Supreme Overlord of Ice, it’s ni-“

“On second thought, it’s Supreme Overlord of Ice, The Forbidden One, Ruler of the Tanaka Empire, holder of the Evil Fourth Eye, gatekeeper of Hell, chosen in the name of Pandaemonium!”

Gundham raised his voice until it resonated with that special power that enabled him to become the most impressive man in the world.

“Sure. As I was saying, it’s nice-“

“WOMAN! Don’t test my patience! You would not like me when I’m angry!”

Suddenly, Rantaro understood all too well what Gundham was trying to do, and he was proven correct. He didn’t let her finish a single sentence, everything was rejected, pushed back, ignored. He talked about intelligible nonsense from start to finish, even when they tried to show the investigation he simply started to comment about everything with his powerful voice in such a fast rhythm it was impossible to even try and interrupt him.

When they showed Tenko being covered by the cage, Rantaro decided to risk it an after signaling Gundham to be silent for a moment he shouted: ‘DING DONG, a body has been discovered!’ The audience chuckled and they all waited in silence for the ritual to be finished and the cage to be lifted. When the actual body discovery announcement started to play everyone in the studio laughed loudly, her death had become a funny joke. Immediately after, the investigation started again and Gundham resumed his personal operation. Rantaro was lost after the first hour of nonsense, he could intercept
only pieces here and there, like ‘the conjunction of stars was not favorable’ and ‘the power of the magic circle is too weak, signaling a weak intention’ and ‘the incantation was not spoken correctly.’ At some point, the production had to raise the volume significantly so the audience could actually hear Shuichi investigating but half the people looked completely exhausted, drunk on words. Rantaro had a headache himself, but maybe that was because he was trying hard to hide his laughter.

During the trip back to the complex, he asked Gundham how could he have come up with all these things and Gundham, with a perfectly straight face, answered: ‘I actually repeated the same speech five times, no one noticed.’ Rantaro could not remember the last time he had laughed so much. Once he was back in his apartment, he collapsed on his bed exhausted but before falling asleep, he browsed the internet in search of opinions.

-Man, I love Gundham but he never stops talking…-
-I didn’t understand a single thing about the case, but it looks like bullshit anyway so whatevs-
-Shows us more Miu, Miu is hot!-
-I’ll listen to his voice all nights from now on until I fall asleep <3-
-Yeah, good luck with that…-
-It was so obvious that someone was going to die in that stupid séance… geez, why is the double murder so easy to spot?- 
-Because Danganronpa keeps reusing the same cliché, that’s why! This phase is booooorrring!-
-Who do you think did it?- 
-Who cares? Just show me Maki’s ass already!-
‘Why do I have the impression that some of these comments are incredibly familiar?’

He had a very good dream that night, but he could not remember what it was. When he checked his phone, he found a message from Hinata-san. ‘Tonight they will show only the first half, this trial is especially long. Only Chabashira-san’s case will be solved.’ Hinata-san was getting really determined to help him if he was going out of his way giving him this information. Soon after, he received another message, this time from Nagito. ‘There is no need for you to comment on the trial, Shinguji did a perfect job in making himself as unlikable as possible.’ Rantaro stared at the message for a while, he supposed he was grateful to be able to avoid the studio for a couple nights, but if Nagito was saying something like this, it must have been something big.

Rantaro actually was able to avoid the studio for five days. He spent that time posting comments all over the internet together with his friends. The general feeling was that this trial was only a filler to endure before the fourth phase, which was usually much better. Rantaro discovered that it was really difficult to sway people’s opinions. They were much more used to the show clichés and rhythms than he was, and they had unwavering faith that the fourth and fifth trial would be something amazing as usual.

Rantaro also discovered what Nagito had meant when he mentioned Korekiyo. His backstory was incredibly messed up. A serial killer with an incest relationship… not exactly husband material there. Or at least Rantaro hoped so, he was not sure he could bet on in this world obsessed with Danganronpa.

The following three days were the three interviews with those involved in the third case. They went
in order of death, first Angie, then Tenko and then Korekiyo. Rantaro had wanted to talk with the
guy, but Nagito’s message had actually deterred him quite a bit and now he had lost the chance.
Angie was going back home, Tenko had taken one of the apartments in the complex so she could
stay closer to Himiko where she would wait for her to wake up. Rantaro could not imagine what
Korekiyo’s life would be from now on.

“Pretty messed up, right?” asked Hiyoko, reading his mind. “That’s Danganronpa for you. I told you
that we’re their toys. I’m pretty sure his life is ruined now, not to mention his parents’, if he still has
them. Going on TV with a story like this? There’s no way he can escape this stigma. But who
knows, maybe he is happy. After all, he had no problem confessing all that shit to them at the end.
By the way,” she changed completely the subject without any warning, “Leader’s popularity is
raising fast. Our little meddling worked. We spent the whole week convincing people that he is the
only one that can provide us with a good show at this point. Well, not all of us did that.” she sneered.
“The stupid, ugly pig called Teruteru has only written stupid comments about the girls being hot.
What a perv!”

‘Oh, now I see why some of the comments looked strangely familiar…’

“Tonight officially starts the fourth phase,” Hiyoko changed the subject again, “the social media
posts will be shown on screen and we need to be more careful. Let’s just hope that we did enough.”

Rantaro observed her for a moment before smiling fondly. Mahiru’s influence was doing her temper
a lot of good, now she was actually showing a caring side, finally. Rantaro was worried about
Kokichi as well. His popularity was raising, but he was still fighting for the first place with Shuichi
and Kaito. Even Maki’s popularity was rising quite a bit. Kokichi’s permanence in the show
depended entirely on the next week pool results, and he knew that. Rantaro was unsure of what it
was best. Should he try and praise him during the broadcast to make him more popular or not? It
could help in keeping him inside the game, but at the same time, it could help the show do better. He
didn’t want to throw away all the weeks of hard work.

The doorbell rang, pulling him out of his thoughts. They were currently inside Fuyuhiko’s apartment,
so he waited for the ex-Yakuza to open his door. On the other side, to Rantaro’s surprise, were
Tenko and Chiaki. Before any of them could greet them or ask what was going on, Tenko stood
right in the middle of the living room, placed her fist on her chest, forming a cross, and then bowed
deeply.

“I apologize for my foolish behavior! I did a lot of thinking and realized that in this world, exist as
many degenerate females as degenerate males! I thought Tsumugi was a good person and I was
wrong. I thought Kokichi was a bad person and I was wrong. I apologize! Please let me join your
cause! I’m going to protect Himiko and the others with all my strength!”

Kaede got to her feet and extended a hand to her.

“Welcome to the team Tenko!”

Chapter End Notes

Next time at Present Side:
Conversations inside a locked shower stall are the best. (??)

I'm not a fan of this chapter... I was kinda sick when I wrote it and I was very eager to
finish chapter 3, my least favorite chapter. Sorry, I know it's incredibly rushed.

Okabe Kyouma is half the real name and half the 'fake' name of Okabe Rintarou, from Steins;Gate.
Steins;Gate is a Visual Novel and anime and it's pretty good, give it a look if you haven't yet!
Okabe Rintarou is a textbook case of Chuunibyou, just like Gundham, so it was pretty obvious I would choose him ^_^

BTW, to compensate for this so-so chapter I'll give you a good news! From the Past to the Present is COMPLETED!
100% completed! It's all saved in AO3 as well so... Don't ever worry about this fic getting dropped because that's not happening! ;)
“This situation is not equal at all; you can pick the lock and get yourself out of there.”

“Wow, Saihara-chan, you’ve gotten better since last time we talked! Did you learn how to stop trusting others?” he smiled widely.

“You realize this is not helping you, right? You wanted to talk to me, right?” his tone was harsh.

“Not really, you need my help to leave this room! So, you have to listen to me! Besides…” he baited him. “You wanted to hear my motive for what I did, right?”

Saihara-chan stared at him for a long moment while they were both completely still. Slowly he closed his eyes, collecting all his patience, then he opened them again frowning deeply.

“Then talk, you better make some sense, because I’m not going to listen to another speech about you enjoying the game.”

Kokichi collected his thoughts for a moment; he had to be convincing and truthful as much as possible to attract Saihara-chan’s helpful side. He loved to be of help, as long as someone was capable of asking the right way. Persuading Momota-chan would be much harder, Saihara-chan was angry with him, but still willing to hear an explanation, he was not blind and deaf like his best friend.

“You already know that Iruma-chan was trying to kill me, but you don’t know why.” Saihara-chan was staring at him, not missing even a tiny movement. “You have to know, some time ago I asked her to make us some weapons to fight against the Exisals. They are hammers that disable electronic devices. She made them like I asked her, but then she started doubting me. She said that she didn’t want to trust anyone anymore, that she was going to make it out of here alone. For a period, I ignored her, but then she was going nuts over that computer and she hid the Electrohammers away from me. Then I decided to take a look at what she was doing with that computer and discovered the cold, hard truth! She was going to escape by killing me!”

“All right,” Saihara-chan’s expression didn’t change, “I can believe this. I’m not sure about the hammers thing… The rest, sure, I can believe it.” Kokichi became guarded, there was surely a ‘but’ in there somewhere, and he knew it was coming. “But why didn’t you just do the most obvious thing and call for help? If we knew that she wanted to kill you, we could have helped.”

“Ah, but Saihara-chan!” too easy. “No one believes me! Who would have helped me? No one.”

“I would have.” he interrupted him with his harsh tone. “I would have.”

The worst part was that Kokichi could actually believe him. He would have helped him. Kokichi was not sure how much he, alone, could have helped him but he was completely sure he would have tried anyway. He would have probably ended up dead in his place too. Sweet, foolish Saihara-chan.

“Even if you had helped me, nothing would have changed,” he reasoned. “Even if she could not attack me, she would have only changed her target. The more we would’ve pushed her in a corner, the more fiercely she would have bitten back. She was like a rabid dog; her reasoning had left her long ago. Who, in their right mind, would throw away the possibility to escape using the hammers in favor of killing someone? She was so scared of her own shadow that she thought I would rat her out
to Monokuma and get her killed. She wanted to kill me to silence me. I had to get Gonta’s help—"

“No, you surely didn’t need to.” he was still stubbornly refusing to listen to reason.

“Yes, I needed to. I had to make sure she would not have access to the Electrohammers anymore. You know what would have happened otherwise?” Saihara-chan refuse to answer him. “C’mon I know that you can figure out on your own.”

“She could have escaped on her own as soon as she could sense that the investigation was going in the wrong direction for her.” the Detective closed his eyes, as if he was in pain.

“Yes. If you had uncovered the truth of my death, she would have used the Electrohammers on her own. You all had no idea they even existed, you would have never been able to defend yourselves from something completely unexpected. She had the winning cards. I tried to reason with her, but she was beyond saving.”

“All right, let’s assume you are right!” Saihara-chan shouted angrily. “Why kill Gonta as well?!”

“He was the only one that could help me. Who else?”

“Me.” he remarked the word strongly.

“No way. No offense Saihara-chan, but you cannot protect me from a fly, let alone a crazy girl with a metal pipe. I had to ask someone like Gonta.” he shook his head lightly. “Only he or Momota-chan were strong enough to help. I couldn’t ask Momota-chan now, could I?”

“Maybe if you had wasted a bit less time messing around, Kaito would have helped you.”

Ouch, Saihara-chan was merciless when he wanted.

“Aren’t you happy? If he had helped me now, he would be the dead one. It’s better like this, right?” two could play the cruel game.

Saihara-chan clenched his fist in irritations and looked away for a moment.

“Kaito would have never killed, no matter what, I trust him.”

This discussion was going nowhere. Kokichi could waste a lifetime explaining to Saihara-chan about all of the things he was wrong about, but now it was really not the right time.

“All right, I’m a piece of shit, let’s agree about that and call it a day, okay?” he waved a hand in the air with nonchalance. “Now, the important stuff. I have the Electrohammers now and I’m giving them to you guys.”

“What?” Saihara-chan’s disbelief was evident.

“I’m giving them to you. All of you should take the underground tunnel and go, you can use the hammers to disable the traps by hitting the control panel at the start of the tunnel and then you can open the door at the end.” he explained keeping his voice as steady as possible, he needed to believe in this part, it was important.

“This is a trap of some sort, right? You have never given me anything for free. Never.” Kokichi could see the doubts starting to fill him as he said that.

“If you are so afraid of me, you can leave me in here, after I give you the key you can leave the room and take the key away with you. I can lock pick this lock but not that other one, it’s a security lock
for a prison. I’m a genius, but even I have limits!”

Saihara-chan rolled his eyes. Obviously, Kokichi had another escape route but that was a secret.

“No, I’m not afraid of you, more like of the hammers and the tunnel. Did you place some trap in there? You are not coming with us, if I’m getting what you are implying correctly. This makes me even more suspicious.” his tone was progressively losing his hardness. He was almost there.

“I’m not coming because I don’t want to die, Momota-chan and his cute girlfriend will kill me if I show myself. There are no traps in there, except for the one that Monokuma prepared.” he stared into his eyes firmly. “You are free to not believe me, but I think that Momota-chan’s time is very limited. You may want to take the risk. Or what? You think that I want to kill you all? If that was my intention, you know that I could have done it already. I don’t need such a convoluted plan to kill you all, I’m a genius after all.”

“And very modest too.” Saihara-chan sighed dramatically.

“Nishishi!” Kokichi shrugged.

“Why do I believe you?” he was talking to himself massaging his eyes. “This reeks so much of a trap. I don’t even…” he sighed again.

“Saihara-chan, I never wanted to win the game. If I wanted to do that there were tons of ways I could have done so already, you know that.” the stared into each other eyes again. “You know that I never wanted to win the game.”

Kokichi was not lying; he never wanted to win the game. It was easy to sustain his gaze knowing that he was telling him the absolute truth, while omitting something, obviously. Saihara-chan stared for a while, in search of an opening of sort, and then he signed once again, defeated. He grabbed the key on the sink and opened his lock.

“You are not going to kill me, are you?” Kokichi asked. One could never be too careful.

“Shut up.” he opened the grate.

Kokichi chuckled. Saihara-chan trying to act like a tough guy was just too funny. He was such a softy.

“So, where are these hammers? What am I supposed to do with them?”

“I’ll bring them to you. I hid them in a safe place. Bring them to your friends tomorrow morning. Tell them you found them somewhere or that you created them, I don’t care. Think of some good lie.” he pulled out the key from his scarf.

“Is this ‘safe place’ the one you used until now? I searched all over for you!” he followed him to the shower room door.

“Yes! I already said it a bunch of times, I’m a master at hide and seek! I’ll see you in the entrance hall!” Kokichi started to run away. We don’t want to break the tradition now, do we?

“Kokichi!” Saihara-chan called him. “You better not be scheming anything, next time you trick me I’m not going to give up so easily. I’m going to hunt you down even if you hide on the moon.”

“Nishishi!” Kokichi waved a hand at him grinning and ran away.
Poor Saihara-chan.

Chapter End Notes

Next time Somewhere:
Does Chiaki have a skeleton in the closet?

Tomorrow a new chapter of Oasis!
After Tenko sat next to Kaede in front of a laptop, Chiaki sat beside him.

“How is my blog doing? Is it useful?” she asked.

“Yes, of course! Your talent of Ultimate Gamer may be fake, but you really know your way with technology!” he praised her. “It was a great idea to start this blog for us!”

She was silent for a moment, and then she took the mouse from him and started browsing through her site.

“I can only assume that you have not taken a good look around. If you had searched a bit deeper you would have found this.” she pointed with the cursor a section called ‘Old archive’. “Take a look.”

Rantaro clicked on the section after taking control of the mouse again, inside were many subsections. They were named ‘Danganronpa 51’ ‘Danganronpa 50’ ‘Danganronpa 49’ and so on; the oldest one was Danganronpa 41. Rantaro opened one of the section and inside were tons of different topics about everything, the characters, the setting, the murders, the trials, and statistic. Anything to do with that season really. He opened a topic at random and he discovered that it was an extremely detailed post made under Chiaki’s pseudo account about the subject of the topic. There were images, data and a lot of writing. He opened another one and it was very similar. Then he changed sections and tried again. All of the sections and topics had been made under Chiaki’s pseudo account and they were incredibly enthusiastic and accurate. It was like there were made by the biggest Danganronpa’s fan ever. Rantaro stared at Chiaki and she smiled back at him.

“Before season 51 I was recognized as the number one Danganronpa’s fan. My blog was constantly appearing on the show and I loved everything about it. I spent days working on it, it was my biggest passion. Before Danganronpa 51 started, I participated in a special casting, one that was for aspiring masterminds only. I was chosen for the following season, the 52nd. So, while Danganronpa 51 was airing I was backstage, learning how to properly host a season. Just like how a girl named Towa Monaca is now learning from Shirogane. I was there when everything happened. During season 51 I had a painful awakening. I was already aware that some people were being actually ruined by the show itself, and that not all backstories were made with the best interest in mind. Still, I wanted to believe in the project more than anything else in the world. I wanted to be a part of it. Seeing Nagito, Byakuya, Hajime and all the others suffer during the season made me feel sick, but I kept repeating to myself that it was just virtual reality. That they were not actually in danger. Then Ikusaba Mukuro died and everything went crazy. The people in the company kept it a secret and they even charged her parents legally. Contrary to Ryota, who immediately went to Hajime after the end of the season, I decided to use my role inside the company to search for more information. I wanted to know, had other people died during the game? How many people actually suffered greatly from it? It was during my investigation that I found out the real purpose and the old purpose that the old machine was supposed to serve. At the end of it, I was sure of what I really wanted to do with my life. My life is now dedicated to ending Danganronpa and restoring the original Neo World Program. I want to help people like Hajime and Nagito, and you and Leader of course. Can you forgive me; can you forgive the old me?”

Rantaro was speechless. He didn’t know enough about her to really say things like, “I wasn’t expecting this from you”. But for some reason, he had never thought that Chiaki could be a fan of
Danganronpa. Looking back now it made perfect sense, only a fan would actually want to mastermind a season, like Shirogane. Chiaki had a change of heart just in time, she masterminded a game that maybe was not extremely popular, but was surely happier than most. Whatever her reasons had been to start all this, he was not in a position to criticize her, anyway.

“Don’t mention it, Chiaki. I participated by my own free will, I was probably a fan as well. It would be very hypocritical of me to judge you.”

“No, I don’t think you were a fan, more like a desperate child.” she shook her head. “I was there for your interview. I saw your older self. I saw all of you. You had just run away from home, you were desperate and alone. You know what’s very sad? Normally, we need consent from the families, since you were all underage, but in your case, they decided to cast you anyway. Since you ran away, they decided to consider you orphan and go on without consulting anyone. I had to track down your parents and let them know, but it was already too late, you were already connected. Your casting was the one that made me the angriest.”

“Ah, don’t worry about it Chiaki, really. That too was my own fault, please don’t blame yourself!” he raised his hands in a pacifying gesture.

“Of course I blame myself. As I blame myself for not had been able to spare you and Leader from this pain. Being Survivors is cruel and is done only to make the audience even more obsessed over certain characters. It’s unhealthy under every aspect.” she hung her head. “You know another reason why I decided to host a season?”

“No…” of course he didn’t.

“I was recognized as number one, but Shirogane was right behind me. She was just as obsessed. She only started later than I did with her blog activities. Our ‘fan base’ was getting divided between us, there was an intern war, the fans wanted to see which of us was the best. I was desperate for my position; I was scared of losing it… So I thought that masterminding a season directly would make me the uncontestable winner. I collected so many different ideas; I wanted to make the best season ever. Then everything changed and I ended up mastermind for a weaker season than most, but I didn’t care. I had completely forgotten that Shirogane even existed. Until after the season. She accused me of cheating; she said that I was a selfish person. She said that she would be the mastermind for a season that would be much better than mine, that she would steal my spot in everyone’s heart forever. So basically, it’s my fault she is there today too. I made her even more obsessed with it. I tried to talk to her, to make her see reason… She hates me; she never listened to a word I say. And I’m afraid that she doesn’t really care. I think that she doesn’t care about the participants suffering, she just wants the popularity.”

“Yes, I think you are right.” Rantaro was talking to himself. “She never even considered herself as part of the cast; unlike you she never tried to actively interact with us, to be a part of the game. She just blends into the background, like she’s better than the rest of us… Instead, she becomes a tiger as soon as she leave the Neo World Program. It’s clear that she thinks of herself as superior from us. She is so obsessed with her little play that she is moving the plot along and she is forgetting to adapt it to the personalities she created. Like Kirumi, she didn’t realize her Motive Video was stupid because she never stopped and tried to think about her. She just wanted to add something of impact like a Prime Minister and stuff. She doesn’t appreciate her own characters.”

Chiaki’s cellphone suddenly rang.

“It’s Hajime, I have to go back.” she got up. “Tonight I have to start working as the Media Manager; I will take part in the show from now on. I’d rather be Hajime’s assistant forever, but I can help more using my ability with social media.” she gave a kind smile. “Thanks for listening to me, I appreciate
Rantaro nodded at her and smiled. Chiaki left after whishing a good night to everyone and they all took a break to eat Teruteru’s food. Tenko, who was eating it for the first time, was crying.

“How can a degenerate so degenerate make such delicious food? I don’t understand.”

When Danganronpa started, she immediately started screaming at the screen to show Himiko. They sure had gotten a noisy ally. The night was completely stolen by Chiaki; she had her season 52 outfit on again and with her sweet and gentle voice, she was explaining the media feature of the show, inviting everyone to post comments online so she could show them to the world. Shirogane collaborated with her but she was really cold, even her sassy attitude was less evident than usual. They showed only a little of the Neo World Program, specifically Kokichi stealing the card key that was supposed to be the next motive and hiding himself in his Lab while the others went out exploring.

Rantaro thought long and hard about the card key, but the only use he could think of was to open the hidden door inside the library that he was trying to inspect when he was killed. If Kokichi had took it, he must had had some reason; he really wanted to know what it was.

Rantaro, later in his bed, realized, if he wanted to help Leader and comment of him correctly on the show, he needed to be on the same page as him. He could cheat and ask Hinata-san for the footage, but he really needed to step up his game and try to predict his actions and motives better.

Rantaro barely slept that night, his mind was working too fast. Kokichi had a plan concerning the Electrohammers and Bugvacuum, but Rantaro could not see anything past the obvious. He was going to disable something electronic, probably the Exisals, with the hammers. But then what? Was he thinking about escaping from the tunnel? Because that would be useless, but he could not know that, since he couldn’t remember he was inside a virtual world. So maybe yes, he was trying to escape using the hammers. But was that all? That somehow didn’t sound right. Rantaro kept hitting dead ends every time he tried to think about the card key. Maybe Kokichi was only trying to safe keep it. That didn’t sound right either.

Playing mental games with him was really difficult.

Inside the studio, the next day Chiaki sent him a discreet greeting while he was waiting for Shirogane to arrive and start the show. The screen was showing comment after comment; they were mostly of impatience and curiosity about the fourth phase and the new motive. Kokichi had finally made a move and everyone was eager to see more. After the usual introduction, the montage of the day started rolling, they showed all the new areas, Shuichi’s and Shirogane’s Lab specifically. The vast amount of poisons inside Shuichi’s Lab was screaming murder and Nagito said so out aloud, direct as usual.

-Great now we know the next murder weapon…-

-How much is the starting bet? Next murder: poison. Confirmed by Mr. Bullshit-

Rantaro had to cover his mouth, now he knew why everyone was looking forward to the social media phase. The atmosphere was much livelier now. The scene moved to the exterior of the Academy where Kokichi hid behind the shrine of judgment. Shuichi noticed him but didn’t approach him, to Rantaro surprise. He, instead, made Kiibo’s Lab appear from thin air and fall from the sky. Ryota had said that they wanted to avoid making impossible occurrences in this season, but that felt impossible enough. Maybe it was Byakuya or Hinata-san’s idea, if so, it was a good one, Kokichi surely would’ve noticed, he had his mouth wide open.
After a quick tour of the interior of Kiibo’s Lab, Shuichi went after Kokichi behind the shrine. Rantaro was impressed by the young Detective, he looked like a kid but he had some serious coherency, he was not letting Kokichi go at all. They started playing rock-paper-scissors. Rantaro immediately knew that Kokichi knew how to play, like, on a competitive level. They tied a million times and Rantaro was not even trying anymore to hide his chuckling. Kokichi ran away from the Detective after hinting his real ability at the game, Shuichi remained frozen on the spot, looking at his hand still shaped like a scissor, deep in thought. Rantaro wondered what he was thinking.

-Kokichi is such a troll!-

-Kid Detective, you chose a bad opponent ahaha!-

-They are so cute!-

Chapter End Notes

Next time at Present Side:
He has me figured out.

Originally the scene at the end, where Shuichi stares at his hand, was supposed to be one of the little hints of his increasing affection toward Kokichi but now, thanks to Oasis, you already knew that.
I still consider Oasis an extra, is not necessary to understand the story at all, but at least it's a cute extra, I guess.
Present Side

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Kokichi abandoned the Electrohammers in the entrance hall and went back into his Lab.

He told Saihara-chan they would meet there but it was better this way, for both. From his monitors he observed the Detective looking around in his search and then trying to collect all the hammers at once, he failed in both tasks. Saihara-chan then collected half the hammers and went outside with them, he was probably putting them into his room, after a while he came back and took the other half.

Kokichi slept the whole night and woke up early in the morning, he needed to be lucid and in total control that day. This was the most crucial part of his plan, after this, he just needed to wait for the mastermind's move and counterattack. Luckily, flexible thinking was his strong suit.

When everyone gathered in the dining room, he observed an interesting scene. Saihara-chan brought the Electrohammers in there with Kiibo’s help and started to actually lie to them. He told them he had found these hammers inside Iruma-chan’s Lab together with a manual about how to use them. He said that initially, he had hesitated a little to tell them he had found them because he was afraid it was a trap, but now he had tested them and he was sure they were authentic. Kokichi had noticed that they were short by one, Saihara-chan had actually tested them on his own. Kokichi was pleased; the Detective was trusting but definitely not stupid. Momota-chan was easily convinced into trying the underground tunnel again. Saihara-chan convinced him, which in turn, convinced everyone else. As they each grabbed a hammer, and started to make their way to the tunnel, he called for Monokuma.

“Here is Mono-mono-mono-Monokuma!” the bear dropped from the ceiling and bounced on the floor.

“Today is a nice day to cause some mischief! I want to have my prize now!” he said cheerfully.

“Puhuhu! I dunno what you are scheming, but I know you gave those hammers to them!” he put his paws to his mouth. “I hope this is something good, otherwise the audience will be pissed!”

Kokichi resisted the urge to smirk; pissing off the audience was indeed his objective. Since he knew that dying was not that big of a deal, he could take the risk and if he died before he could get a result, at least he could say that he tried his utmost best.

“C’mon, you already know what I want to do! It’s time to reveal the apocalyptic setting!” no use in hiding it, why would they go into the underground tunnel otherwise? “I’m going make them all fall in despair, just like Gonta!”

“Yeah, but why do you need the Exisals for that?” asked the bear.

The fact that he was asking all these questions was a clear message: the staff had not understood his intention at all and was a bit worried about lending him a potential weapon. Kokichi was sure, however, that the only thing they really feared was him killing everyone in one go. The Exisals were not capable of destroying virtual reality; they were a part of it. If Kokichi were to do something they didn’t like, they would just make it right using their admins’ right to change reality itself. To change the world itself.
“I’m just going to scare them a little bit, I want them to think that it’s best not to screw with me!” that was not entirely a lie.

“Hmm… I see. You are a selfish bastard as well! I don’t dislike it!” he snickered.

“Thank you! I’ll do my best!” Kokichi smiled happily.

Kokichi left his Lab and Monokuma was waiting for him outside with the Exisals all aligned and stationary.

“Just say what you want them to do, they’ll do it. Remember, 24 hours, not another minute beyond that.” he jumped away disappearing.

Kokichi climbed onto the red Exisals, he was not sure he could pilot them, but as a last resource, he could just order them to pilot themselves. In the upper half of the Exisals was a small seat that looked made specifically for this purpose. So the programmers had already accounted for the possibility of someone using them. How nice of them to be so prepared. Piloting the machine was easier than he would have expected. He then remembered that this was virtual reality and so this was not a real machine; logic didn’t apply here. They made them easy to pilot, first, because programming them differently was a useless pain in the ass and secondarily, because the participants were supposed to be able to pilot them.

He entered the tunnel with the other four Exisals following him; he moved slowly, the possibility of encountering the others too soon was not good. He reached the last section of the tunnel with partial darkness without too much trouble and climbed down from the machine. He told them to wait for his signal there. He was feeling a bit stupid, talking to machines, but he knew he was actually talking to the programmers right now. They were the ones making them move.

Walking, as silently as possible, he got closer to the door that led to the ‘outside world’, the others were in front of it. Saihara-chan swung his hammer on the control panel and they joined forces to open the door. Kokichi held his breath, this time he was prepared. The siren rang loud through the tunnel and they peeked outside. The same red that had greeted Kokichi, greeted them as well and they were all frozen in place. Kokichi was relieved, for a moment he was afraid the programmers had changed the scenario and made all his efforts useless. They could do that. It was simply an image after all, they could choose a different one in a moment. The poisoned gas started to spread and Kokichi sneaked closer to the control panel, ready to close it as soon as they would start to be affected. He didn’t have to wait for long, they started to cough and in a moment they were on their knees. Kokichi noticed with great interest that Kiibo was initially unaffected, he was looking at the others with confusion, then suddenly his eyes became empty and he fell to his knees too. So Kiibo was immune to poison, but the programmers decided to turn him off for a bit to create a more tragic scene. After all, the atmosphere would have been ruined if he had started screaming and panicking right there. This was supposed to be a serious scene with despair and all that good stuff that surely was making the audience wild with excitement. He filed this information in his brain for later.

He quickly swept the good old card key in the machine and the siren rang again. He looked around; they looked bad, but not dead or on the verge of dying. Not that this would have ever happened, it was too boring, Monokuma would have saved them if it had come to that. He stood further away from all of them, closer to the tunnel and the Exisals, ready to call for them in case of danger. He waited as all of them slowly got to their feet, Kiibo’s eyes lit up again. They were so out of it that they didn’t even notice him.

“Congratulations!” he screamed with all his might. “You have completed the Killing Game! Happy ending guys!”
Saihara-chan was the first one to locate him, he looked pretty bad, but when he saw him, his expression hardened. Kokichi ignored him and looked at the others. When he was sure that all of them were lucid enough to hear what he had to say, he started talking. He had practiced this speech for quite some time in his mind, so everything came naturally. He started to pull things out of his ass, something about the meteorites, something about the end of the Earth and the extinction of the human race, something about them being in a spaceship and this being the distant future. Monokuma had not told him what the ‘official’ version of this stuff was, so he just filled the gaps as he pleased. If it was different from their version it was irrelevant, they could not ‘replay’ this scene, so they had to run with what Kokichi was saying. This was one of the reasons why he had chosen this method. Wiping all their memories and restarting this scene from scratch would take an enormous amount of work, the most convenient thing was to just roll with the flow. Kokichi was very proud of himself for being able to ruin their fun and put them in a dilemma.

“Well then!” he concluded, “To tell you the truth… I’m the mastermind, this was all done by me! Am I not the coolest? C’mon, you have to admit it! I kidnapped fifteen kids and made them kill each other on a spaceship! Am I or am I not a genius?!"

“Why… Why would you do such a thing?! Are you completely crazy?!” Momota-chan shouted violently.

“Why? Because it’s fun, why else?!” he showed his best evil grin. “You have to know that I have a thing for human psychology! Seeing you all in this situation was so stimulating! I’ve learned so much about human nature thanks to you all! I’m so grateful! Your reactions were so interesting and genuine! It just doesn’t compare to the test subjects I’ve used until now! Gosh seeing you all fighting so earnestly to survive was hilarious! In the end, I could not stop myself and I ended up messing with Gonta, it was just too fun you know?! I was having such a good time I went a bit overboard! Oh well!”

The silence was long and heavy. Momota-chan was breathing increasingly more and more erratically. It was time to end this.

“Now, I don’t need you anymore, you are free to do whatever you want. You can leave but well… you all saw what’s out there. You are free to stay as well. I don’t mind, I’m not going to waste any more time with you. I wanted to see which of you would reach the end; I never intended to kill you all. Ah, but don’t even try to defy me, I’ll kill you all for real in that case.”

“Yeah, how?!” Momota-chan ran toward him. Just as Kokichi planned. “I want to see you try!!”

“Exisals!” Kokichi called and the machines appeared on his sides. He pointed at Momota-chan who was slowing down and taken by surprise. “Capture him!”

The blue Exisel grabbed Momota-chan and the guy lost consciousness. Probably the shaking was a bit too strong for his sick avatar body.

“LET HIM GO!” Harukawa-chan’s scream was almost feral.

“Don’t even try, killer!” he stood his ground. “I’ll squash him like a worm if you take another step!” she stopped but pulled out a knife from her skirt. What a charming girl. “Good. Glad you understand. Now, Saihara-chan, if I recall Monokuma gave you his remote control for the hanger, right? Give it here; I’ll trap this idiot in there.”

“No.” Saihara-chan’s voice was hard.

Kokichi was taken by surprise but quickly recovered. Maybe he had not understood.
“Give it here or I’m killing your precious friend!” he repeated.

“Go ahead.”

Everyone, Kokichi included, froze on the spot.

‘WHAT?’

“Are you deaf?! I’m saying that I’ll kill him!” Kokichi shouted at him.

“Go ahead, I wanna see you kill him.”

Saihara-chan’s voice was angry but firm. He was staring him right in the eyes. Kokichi fell into a complete panic in a second.

‘He has me figured out, he has me figured out, HE HAS ME FIGURED OUT!’

Virtual reality or not there was just no way Kokichi would ever personally give these machines the order to kill another human. Even if Momota-chan was an avatar, Kokichi didn’t have the balls to do something like this, even in this situation.

‘He didn’t fall for my story, he has everything figured out, I’ve failed! It didn’t work! I need to retreat!’

Kokichi took a step back; his body was freezing cold, then another. Saihara-chan was still staring at him, challenging him. Throwing all complicated plans out the window, Kokichi turned around and started to run.

“DON’T RUN AWAY, OUMA KOKICHI!”

Chapter End Notes

Next time Somewhere:
Time limit.

And so the canon divergence began!
From now on the little previews are going to be little quotes from the chapters themselves. I’m going to have some fun selecting the most controversial ones :P
Tomorrow another Oasis.
The internet was overflowing with comments about Kokichi.

Not only had he entertained them all with his little show of rock-paper-scissors, he had played a knife game the next day too. Both times with Shuichi. The whole wide web was engulfed in what Peko had called ‘the Kokichi effect’. It was like Kokichi and Shuichi were the only two playing; every single comment was about them, whether alone or together. Peko explained that during V2, Kokichi had the same effect after the third trial; everyone was so enchanted by him, the game looked like a one-man show. Everyone else was important only the moment that they were interacting with Kokichi. Leader had his own unique charm; he was capable of capturing everyone’s attention without even trying. Rantaro had thought he was the only one who felt this way because he was so focused on understanding what the short guy had in mind, instead he discovered that the audience was literally eating all of his words up. They were quoting him on daily basis, they were memorizing everything he was doing and saying. Rantaro finally understood. Kokichi had a talent for keeping people on edge. A person could be mad at him, annoyed by him, amused by him or anything in-between, it didn’t matter, that person was still waiting for his next move. Everyone was expecting the world from him.

Shirogane had chosen to manipulate him in particular for a reason. Kokichi could run the show alone if he wanted.

As much as Rantaro was impressed by him, he was worried too. Danganronpa was regaining popularity again because of him. It was not his fault by any means, but it was still happening. What worried Rantaro the most was: if Shirogane could find a way to kill him in a spectacular way right now this season would become extremely memorable. Kokichi and Shuichi had too good of a chemistry together, the audience was starting to ship them together.

In a text message, Nagito informed him, very kindly, that the manga about Kokichi and Rantaro was having a huge decline in sales. Rantaro didn’t know this manga existed, now he hoped it would become extinct before he could land his eyes on it. The text message ended with a question: The manga about Shuichi and Kokichi has already 2,000 preorders, wanna preorder one? Nagito was having too much fun with this.

Seeing Kokichi flirt with Shuichi so openly had pained Rantaro. As much as he was happy that Leader was finally trying to start a connection with someone, he already knew this was not going to end well. The audience would go crazy over them and they would end up in the same situation that Sonia and Gundham had to go through. Tears and a tragic love were the perfect ingredients for the show. Furthermore, Miu was acting strange; she refused to give him the Electrohammers. Shirogane was clearly targeting Kokichi. The only thing that was comforting him was the fact that both Kokichi and Shuichi would eventually wake up in the real world, they could still develop whatever feelings they were developing for each other, even after the end of the season.

Rantaro was a bit worried about Kokichi’s health too, he looked to be in pain. In the Neo World Program, every illness was part of the plot, there was no way a normal virus would infect them. So why was he acting as if he was sick? Hinata-san and Chiaki would have informed them if the writers had decided to give him an illness, right?

Rantaro was taking out the trash when he met him. It was so unexpected that he stared at him for a
good minute before he could catch himself.

“Good evening, Amami-san.”

Korekiyo Shinguji, without his mask and his lipstick, was climbing the stairs to the upper floor. He was now dressed in normal clothes, even if the color was still that same dark green.

“Korekiyo… I was not expecting you to be here…” it was a stupid comment, but at least it was honest.

“I guess not, I’m not expected to be anywhere as of late. No matter, solitude suits me.” he was almost out of sight.

“Ah! Ehm…” Rantaro wasn’t sure what he wanted to say, but it felt wrong to just let him go like that. “Do you live here?”

“Yes,” he stopped to look back at him, “My family is not comfortable with me right now. I don’t mind, I’m not comfortable with them either.”

“Aren’t you mad at Danganronpa? For all of this?” he tried, not really sure what to expect.

“Not really. I don’t remember who I was, and I don’t want to remember. People expect me to deny everything I said inside the game, to behave like a normal person.” he chuckled creepily. “Well, too bad. I’m not ashamed of anything I said, I don’t care about anything anyone says.” he bowed his head a little. “See you around Amami-san.”

Rantaro stared at the stairs for a long time; he had still no idea what to think of him. Then, an hour before the start of the show, his cell phone rang.

“Rantaro? It’s an emergency, please come quickly to the hospital!” Chiaki’s voice had an urgency he had never heard before; she hung up before he could even ask anything.

Rantaro quickly changed into street clothes and hurried outside, Nekomaru was about to get into a taxi and invited him to ride with him. When they finally reached the hospital; in the entrance hall were Chiaki, Nagito, Byakuya, Hinata-san and even Ryota. Something big must have happened, Rantaro’s stomach clutched tightly. Thanks to Ryota’s Admin pass, they were able to enter the closed section of the hospital, the one that was hosting the sleeping participants. They had to pass through doors after doors and lines of security until they finally were inside a big room with a gigantic machine in the middle. The white machine had several thick cables that were connected with fifteen oval pods. The upper half of the pods were made of glass and it was possible to look inside. Ryota led them towards one of the pods, it was Kokichi’s. Inside, Leader was resting on the white spongy substance with several little cables connected with little devices all over his body. As Rantaro was observing his body, he had a feeling of anguish grip onto his heart. He had not seen himself in a mirror immediately after he was disconnected from the Neo World Program, but he was pretty sure he had not been so skinny.

Kokichi didn’t look healthy at all, he was tiny even in the Neo World Program, but right now he looked like a little kid. He was so little and fragile Rantaro had the impression he could break his arm just by taking it in his hand. Was his health at risk?

“Ouma-kun was always pretty skinny, even before,” Ryota tried to explain after observing their worried faces, “But right now, he has lost a lot of muscle tone. The avatars in the Neo World Program reflect the state they were when they were first connected. It’s normal to lose some weight. In his case, it’s just more evident.”

“Is he okay?!” Sonia sounded panicked. “What is this emergency, did something happened?”
“If I may…” a doctor appeared from a door. Rantaro immediately recognized him. He was the same one that was with him when he came back to his senses. “His health situation is not the real problem, sure, he is in a very bad shape, but he can keep going for another five or six weeks before he will be truly at risk. The problem is his mental health.”

“His mental health? You mean that he is experiencing a malfunctioning like Mikan?” asked Chiaki with a concerned expression.

“No, that was a very rare occurrence. What this Kokichi kid is experiencing is a natural rejection of the newly implanted memories. The brain becomes increasingly more resistant to the program meddling, and every time you add something, the brain starts to question the new memory. In this season, they are adding a single memory at a time rather than just implanting them all at once. The Kokichi kid had an implantation during season 52 and now he had four other implants. His brain is now resistant to the effect of what they call the ‘flashback light’, which is basically the primary function of the program. Because of that, his brain is starting to compare all the memories that had been implanted, one by one, and it’s making them resurface. He will never be able to recover the memories before the first implant but every implant has now resurfaced, even the ones he was supposed to forget. At this very moment, in the Neo World Program, his brain is mixing them all together in a big mess.”

“What… What does that entail exactly?” asked Fuyuhiko.

“I don’t know how well he will be able to distinguish between reality and fiction after this… The effect of so many memories mixed inside one’s head can be a number of different things and it depends on the person. His mind is fairly strong, as it resists the impulses better than most, but he is not a superhuman, he has limits. In any event, right now this mess is causing him suffering. If this was up to me, I would disconnect him right now.”

“Did you called us here to ask this? If we want to disconnect him?” asked Hinata-san.

“Yeah, pretty much. I can’t make this decision, this kid is Danganronpa’s propriety until he wakes up. They have given me the permission to disconnect him only in the case if his very life is at risk. His mind is not included in the contract. If he develops a mental illness, it is of no concern for them. That’s why I’ve called you Hajime kid. You can convince them to kill him off inside the game and disconnect him. I would advise that. I’m telling you, he is better here than there.”

They started arguing all at once, creating a huge scene of confusion and uncertainty.

“Calm down, calm down!” the doctor raised his voice. “He is not dying, you have time. Think about this and make a decision. I have other things to do.”

They left the room under Chiaki’s advice and went to her apartment, which was nearby, to discuss what to do. Clearly, the prevailing opinion was to help Kokichi get out of the Neo World Program. His health, mental and physical all the same, was too important to risk. Rantaro was convinced it was for the best as well. In any event, the probability of him being killed were pretty high and his involvement in the show was only helping Shirogane. They had been unable to stop Danganronpa this season, defeat was evident, but Kokichi’s safety had the priority. They had to try again the next year. It was already deep into the night when they all expressed their opinion, or at least most of them. Chiaki had not said anything, same with Byakuya and Nagito. Hinata-san said he had no right to decide something so important since he was not even his friend. Ryota pretty much had the same opinion, he said that only a past participant could understand what he was going through and make the right decision. Rantaro was surprised by Chiaki, he was sure she would have said something already. He decided to question her.
“It’s just…” she answered hesitantly. “It’s truly the right thing to force him to quit?”

“What? Of course it is! He is suffering; I thought you cared about him!” Rantaro was truly surprised.

“I care! Of course I care! But…” Chiaki interrupted herself, uncertain.

“But,” intervened Nagito, “Ask yourself a question. Would Kokichi be happy about this? Once he is back in the real world, would he be happy with himself? Have you asked for his opinion? Let him decided his fate. I would have felt absolutely mad with myself and with everyone had I been deprived of the opportunity to try and end Danganronpa in my own way.”

“But we don’t even know if he remembers Danganronpa! Maybe he will just be stressed and confused without an objective for days!” yelled Kazuichi.

“We will know soon enough, won’t we?” Nagito was still completely calm. “We just need to see how he will react to all of this. He is smart, if he wants to live, he will find a way to survive, if he wants to fight, he will find a way to fight. I’ve waited for years for someone like him, you are not going to decide his fate without his permission. Let him decide for himself, if he is fated to die he will die, if he overcomes this obstacle and fights, you have no right to take this from him.” Nagito’s voice had a hint of warning in it.

“This may sound cold, but…” Chiaki put her hand on her chest. “I feel the same way. I think we should wait and see his next move, and then we will decide. Ryota, can you show us the footage from his room? Can you show us what’s happening to him?”

“Sure, later today?” he asked.

“No, now.”

Chapter End Notes

Next time at Present Side:
A hangar, two people. Or maybe three?

I hope the explanation about how the memories are divided in a brain because of the Neo World Program was clear enough.
You can ask for more details if you are confused.
Kokichi ran as fast as the wind.

Regaining a bit of lucidity, he called the Exisals to his side, the blue one was still holding the unconscious Momota-chan. What was he going to do now? His plan had been to make them all inoffensive by scaring and depressing them beyond the breaking point. He was pretty sure he had succeeded with most of them, Kiibo and Yumeno-chan, at the very least. Shiogane looked shocked but she could just be a good actress, if he was right, she was not perturbed at all. Harukawa-chan’s spirit was impossible to break with normal means, which was why he had chosen to take Momota-chan as a hostage. In hindsight, if he had not been so stupid to panic so quickly, he could have pulled this off somehow. His refusal to kill was surely out of character for the ‘big bad mastermind’ but they were too stupid to catch that little detail, only Saihara-chan could see it. They all fell for his theatrics during the last class trial, all except for the Detective.

If he had not been so stupid to fall into the Detective’s trap, his plan would have worked. He had already predicted that he would not completely fall for his story. Saihara-chan was surprising him at every turn. But to confirm his theory about Kokichi so easily... Kokichi should have fought more, he should have rejected his trap and make him play by his rules. But there was something about Saihara-chan that Kokichi could not predict, he could not identify. Kokichi had always considered himself an expert on human nature, but Saihara-chan’s true talent was to catch him off guard. He was not truly a Detective, the Neo World Program stuffed his brain with notions, but the mind could not be improved to work in the correct way with memories alone. Saihara-chan could probably become one if, once outside, he would actually study and practice for it. But right now Kokichi was as much as a detective as he was, if not better. Saihara-chan’s true Ultimate must have been ‘Ouma Kokichi’s ultimate demise’. No doubt.

Honestly, lately, he was almost scared to talk to him. Saihara-chan could undo him far too easily.

Kokichi should have never let all of this affect him in such a delicate moment. This was the moment he had been waiting for, ever since he remembered everything! Now, because of some ‘personal feelings’, he had completely screwed up the plan. This was not only about him, or Danganronpa. He pulled Gonta, Iruma-chan and now even Momota-chan into this mess. He had a responsibility to see this through! Him running away would not discourage them from trying and doing something, they had seen him being weak. People like Harukawa-chan would use the little opening he had left behind to strike. He failed.

He failed.

He failed.

‘GODDAMMIT!!’

His death was impending at this point no matter where he would hide, now that they knew he would not kill Momota-chan they would hunt him down and kill him. Harukawa-chan would kill him, at least. He was pretty sure that not even Saihara-chan would be able to stop her right now. Kokichi wasn’t even sure Saihara-chan would try to stop her at this point. He told him to not trick him again, right? For sure, he would not forgive him now.
Right now, he was not sure what the best course of action was. He could ditch Momota-chan and hide alone in his Lab but... to let Momota-chan go would mean to completely destroy his entire plan. He had to keep Momota-chan since he was his hostage. It was the only card he had in his hands right now. However, he could not hide inside his Lab with him; there was nowhere to lock him. He could not keep the Exisals for much longer, and alone he was not strong enough to restrain him. Furthermore, he didn’t want to reveal his Lab to him. He would have to let him go someday and that would attract all of them to his secret lair. Kokichi needed at least one safe place.

He tried to think about another place. Hoshi-chan’s shower room was interesting, but there was no escape route from there. Well, he could jump into the pool, he guessed, but that had been an emergency solution to use in case Saihara-chan had decided to reach him inside the shower stall. Another locked room was the Art Lab, but there was no place to keep Momota-chan in there. Kokichi’s heart was pounding loudly in his chest, he was almost outside of the tunnel and he still had no plan. This was bad, very bad.

Kokichi wanted to make the Exisals blow up the hidden door in the library, but that was impossible, the bear said they had been disarmed and surely they had some protective code for that door, no one could enter if they didn’t want them to enter, not even blowing up the door would help. The hangar was out of the question. There was no escape route and Saihara-chan had the remote control. There he would be as vulnerable as one can be. He had to ditch Momota-chan, there was no other solution. That way he could escape with his life and hide properly. And abandon everything and just wait to die.

‘That stupid bear was right, I’m so pitiful!’

On the other hand, alternatively, he could resign himself to die and prepare some kind of plan for that. However his death would not affect the audience all that much, even if he could somehow ruin the trial by making them fall into some trap that would only end the season. Nagito did the same thing. Now he could understand the guy’s desperation all too well. His only option was to commit suicide just like Nagito did. His respect for the guy had grown since the last time he saw him, but copying another person’s ideas would hurt Kokichi’s pride. He was better than this.

He decided to go inside the hangar. That was the only place that was providing more of an opportunity to mess around. And he had told them he was going to take Momota-chan there. They could take it as an invitation to attack him if they wanted. He was going to fight this time. Not physically, he was sure that Harukawa-chan could kill him thirty times before he could land a hand on her, but maybe he could-

The best solution in this situation hit him at that moment. With a huge grin, he ran into the hanger after ordering the Exisals to gather his things. He asked for the Electrobombs, the Bugvacuum and a special object from a particular Lab. The programmers had been a bit careless with that one, maybe they were not the same people from before, otherwise they had not learned anything at all.

He ordered the blue Exisal to drop Momota-chan down and he grabbed the guy by his ankles and dragged him inside the small bathroom. He shut the door, he needed to remain close by since he had to open the door at the right time. The Exisals brought the stuff he had asked for, and he ordered them to show up in case the others had reached the hangar, only to inform him they were coming he didn’t need the Exisals for anything else anymore. He mentally prepared himself for the wait, they would probably come sooner rather than later, but there was no guarantee. He was pretty sure Harukawa-chan would want to get her boyfriend back as soon as possible.

Kokichi’s plan could only be called egoistic. It was crazy and completely self-serving. Even if it worked, he really had nothing to be proud of. He was impressed by how much he had managed to
drive himself into a corner. He clearly had thought too highly of himself. Kokichi laughed at himself awkwardly; maybe he really had gone crazy somewhere down the line. He was trembling with anxiety and fear, from them and from himself, but he was comforting himself with the thought that everything would end soon. Everything.

When the hangar opened Kokichi’s heart jumped out of his chest. The Exisals had not informed him, why? The time was not up yet. Then he realized, feeling stupid as hell, that he asked them to inform him when the others were coming. The programmers took him very literally. They didn’t inform him because only one person was entering the hangar. Saihara-chan.

Kokichi grimaced and stiffed reflexively. This was not good. Not good at all. For his plan to work, it required at least killer girl to be present. He could ignore Shirogane and Kiibo. The presence of Yumeno-chan would be preferable, but it was not fundamental. Saihara-chan and killer girl were absolutely indispensable! Why was he alone? Why did he ditch killer girl? Where was she? Was she not in a hurry to save her boyfriend?!

Saihara-chan walked slowly toward him, Electrohammer in hand, his eyes were fixed on him. Kokichi took a step back without really realizing it; he mentally scolded himself for his cowardice. When Saihara-chan was about to reach him, his panic spiked once again. Killer girl was still nowhere to be seen. He tried to buy some time, desperately.

“Saihara-chan, fancy meeting you her—“

Saihara-chan slapped him.

Hard.

“Cut the crap Kokichi, I don’t want to hear it.”

Chapter End Notes

Next time Somewhere:
They can’t risk Kokichi ending the season right now! It never happened before and the audience would be mad, they want to see much more. Things just got interesting!

I know, I know, this chapter is a bit confusing. It’s normal, I made it like this on purpose. Tomorrow there is another Oasis coming.
Thank you everyone for reading my story, truly.
I’m happier thanks to you all, seeing that I’m doing something that people enjoy is doing a lot for my mood.
A big thank you! <3
Rantaro was sneaking around behind a corner inside the Danganronpa headquarters.

It was five in the morning and the building was closed to visitors, they all snuck inside using Ryota’s and Hinata-san’s pass. They were the only two with permission to work at night as Byakuya’s and Chiaki’s contract was for day work only. Ryota had to hack into the system, so they could keep the electronic lock open long enough for all of them to enter. Now they were inside they had to be careful, getting them fired would be the worst case scenario. So, they were sneaking from corner to corner as fast and silently as they could. Well, excluding Tenko. For some reason the Aikido Master was yelling “Sneak Attack!” every time. Rantaro was starting to doubt the memories they had given her to make her a martial artist.

When they were all safely hidden inside Ryota’s office, the Administrator let out a long sigh of relief.

“Sorry, I’m not used to this kind of stuff… Sneaking around in secret makes me nervous.”

“Don’t worry Ryota, it’s my fault for asking to come here so early in the morning.” Chiaki bowed her head. “But I don’t want to make any mistake this time. I want to see how Leader is doing with my own eyes.”

“Yes, I think this is the best course of action.” Hinata gave his ID card to Ryota. “You are not supposed to be working now, my shift starts in half an hour. Use my ID. If anyone asks I’ll just say that I had a good idea and I wanted to take a look as soon as possible.”

“But with your ID I cannot manipulate the Program. I can only rotate the camera angle.”

“It’s fine, we just need to see Ouma-kun right now, and even with just the cameras it’s enough.”

“All right then, thank you.” Ryota sat on his chair and booted up the Neo World Program Interface. “Let’s see… localize Ouma Kokichi…”

They all surrounded him, staring at the screens with apprehension. Ryota’s fingers were dancing on the control panel with incredible speed, he really was a pro, and four years being in this room had made him a wizard.

“Found him, he is in his room.” Ryota pressed a button; the central monitor showed Leader in his room with his forehead pressed on the floor.

“What’s wrong with him?!” Kazuichi was already alarmed.

“I don’t know.” Ryota shook his head. “The program allows me to see him, everything, every moment, but I can’t read his mind or his vitals, that’s the doctors’ job. The vitals I mean, not his mind. No one can read his mind. The Neo World Program modifies their memories, but doesn’t display what they are thinking. We can manipulate them into thinking things, but we have no idea what’s on their mind half the time.”

“But, he is suffering isn’t he?” Mahiru had a hand on her mouth.

“That was something we already knew,” Nagito was merciless, “The point is, what he will do after
“You know, you bastard…” Fuyuhiko spoke up. “I didn’t really forgive the shit you did, you know? It may have been for our sake or whatever but talk about Leader this way again and I’ll punch you.”

Nagito held up his hands in defeat and smiled. They stared hard into Ryota’s monitor for more than an hour. Living in real time and watching the actions inside the Neo World Program was painful. Kokichi got up from the floor and sat on the bed. That simple action took forty minutes. Rantaro was glad he was not working with Ryota or Hinata-san, he would go crazy from watching people move this way all day. Hinata-san left them at six thirty, he was afraid that someone would enter his office and found out he was not working. Chiaki had to leave with him, but she promised to come back as soon as possible. At some point, Byakuya stared to bother everyone with requests to go and eat breakfast. Ryota finally snapped out of his intense focus and told them to go. In any event, he would have the recording.

They rode the elevator to the first floor and then sat in the cafeteria. Nagito discretely took everyone’s visitors pass and went to swipe them on the machine at the entrance; there would be trouble if someone had checked the registers and found out they never passed through the gate. Not legally at least. It was nine when they finally heard some news from Chiaki.

“Ryota’s shift has started, now he can use his ID again. He discovered that Leader saw a computer inside the Neo World Program, which has a mock version of the program itself installed on it. That was what triggered his memories.” she looked still very tense.

“Any difference in him?” asked Sonia with her hands clutched on her chest.

“He is thinking, I don’t know about what, but he doesn’t look in pain anymore. I’ve called the doctor, but he said there are no noticeable changes in him.”

“Should we… wait a bit more?” asked Peko with her calm voice.

“Stop being so indecisive, you fiend! Let him fight, so he can shine his demonic power all over the Hell realm of the Neo World! Shall his shadow cover all the lights of the evil plan for the mind manipulation! Let him slay the very foundations of this rotten world!” shouted Gundham theatrically as always.

The wait was terrible. Kokichi sat in that position for more than three hours inside the Neo World Program which meant they had to go back home to sleep and come back the next day. Ryota greeted them with two black bags and empty eyes; he had pulled another all-nighter to keep an eye on Leader. Rantaro was incredibly grateful to him. He needed to thank him properly eventually.

“Any changes?” he asked him trying to sound as gentle as possible.

“Yeah, he got up, he is making his way to somewhere, I’m not sure of where exactly yet.” he sipped his coffee. “I’m no doctor, but he looks better. At least better than before. He has not spoken yet, so I’m not sure he is completely fine, but at least he is not trembling in a corner, I guess it’s a good sign…” he looked sad.

Rantaro wondered if he had to deal with kids trembling in a corner often. Probably so.

“Are they going to show these scenes of him in pain on TV?” Rantaro suddenly asked.

“No.” Nagito answered from the corner of the room with a confident tone. “They don’t like to show them suffering without any reason. That just makes the audience confused and perhaps a bit worried. They don’t want the audience to question the health of the participants. They want them to believe...”
they have everything under control. They won’t show this.”

“I see… This may sound cold, but it may be a good thing. Leader will probably have a change in attitude after this and they won’t know why. It may create confusion.”

“Yes, but it will depend on what type of change he will undergo.” Nagito shrugged.

Finally they discovered his destination, Kokichi swept the motive card key in the control panel at the start of the tunnel and ventured inside. Rantaro would have never guessed that it was to be used there. As always, Leader was impressive.

“Ryota, what’s at the end of the tunnel?” he probably knew.

“A door that has to be opened by that card key and then a scenario.” Ryota sighed. “Since the beginning that area was ready, we wanted to be sure to not underestimate your determination, so in case you would have been able to reach the other end of the tunnel we had a little ‘surprise’ ready. We let Iruma-san make the Electrohammers for this purpose too. When Ouma-san requested them, the storywriters had a long discussion. They tried to think of all the uses that he could have in mind and the tunnel looked the most promising. That’s why they let her do it.”

“What do you mean a scenario? What’s beyond the door?” Rantaro insisted.

“The ‘plot’ for this season. Shirogane chose a post-apocalyptic setting. I’ll show you.” Ryota quickly entered a sequence of code and the monitor became bright red. Rantaro and the others stared at an image of a wasteland with their mouths open. “This is what’s on the other side of the door. A special effect, that’s like a toxic gas will be released, forcing them to close the door. In other words, they can’t go beyond the door. In more senses than one, the image is a fake 3D projection; they can’t actually walk in there. They would just collide against a wall if they were to try.”

It took Kokichi three hours in the virtual world to reach the end of the tunnel. He opened the door and Rantaro had fifteen minutes to worry sick for him as he kneeled on the ground, clearly out of breath because of the poisonous gas. Ryota was quickly on his cell phone with another department and told them to intervene. Ryota intercepted his confused stare and explained that Monokuma was the responsibility of a single person, a senior that had worked inside this building for thirty years. During the emergencies that were outside of the area of competence of the other Administrators, that person had to control Monokuma and resolve the situation.

“Don’t you have a chat system or some kind of communication method? Why did you call him with your cell phone?” Kazuichi was not impressed.

“Because that man is technically on break 24h a day. He is taking a break even while he is working.” Ryota was not impressed either. “I think he uses his workstation to play video games, or poker. I’m not really sure.”

“Why he has not been fired yet?” asked Kazuichi even less impressed.

“They said… his personality is perfect for Monokuma, or something along these lines…” Ryota didn’t seem to agree.

The conversation with Monokuma was horribly stretched, they could not make out a single word, and the time lag was truly a problem in this case. Ryota sent them an apologetic look and told them they needed to wait for the whole sentence to be completed, then he would rewind the video and show the sentence being said at the right speed. It was evening by the time they finally got the whole conversation. Rantaro was really glad he was not working here.
“Why did Monokuma reveal the prize system to him?” asked Fuyuhiko. “And why did Leader go to him and told him that he remembers everything?”

“Smart move.” intervened Nagito. “We already knew he had remembered, it’s not like he could keep it a secret. This way he can blackmail the production. Deleting everyone’s memory is a hassle; they would never do that unless there is a major disturbance. Kokichi forced them to play by his rules. The managers gave him that information to pay for his silence and to make him play by their rules again. Now they expect him to make the show more interesting to get his prize.”

“But he didn’t mention the Neo World Program or virtual reality, has he really remembered everything?” asked Sonia with a concerned expression.

“I can’t be sure, but if he did remember, he is playing this game splendidly!” Nagito gave them one of his creepy smiles. “Revealing only a part of it, to give them confirmation he had remembered, but not the exact extent is amazing! Just as we are unsure, the managers are unsure as well! They are surely filled with doubt and anxiety over this new development! Kokichi has the cards in his hands; they can only observe him and prepare themselves for the worst! Wonderful!”

Everyone, except for Nagito, fell into a pensive silence.

“Why is this so wonderful?” asked Rantaro after a while, he wanted to understand what was going on in his mind.

“Because this is only the fourth phase! Every Danganronpa season has at least five phases. The 52nd ended with me but if you remember, they gave me the folder only after Nekomaru had died. They were already sure I would drag the season until the fifth phase. But, right now the fourth murder has not occurred yet. They can’t risk Kokichi ending the season right now! It never happened before and the audience would be mad, they want to see much more. Things just got interesting!” he made his way to the door. “Well, I have to talk with Hajime, I want to know what’s going on in the heads of the managers. I’ll see you later. I mean, there is no doubt we are going to keep fighting right?”

No one answered.

“We are still in the game!” he smiled again. “No, actually, we just got in the game!”

Chapter End Notes

Next time at Present Side:
Let’s have this famous chat.
Kokichi placed a hand on his offended cheek. It was still cold. The programmers probably forgot to make it warmer with all this confusion.

“What do you mean crap, Saihara-chan? I was just greeting you!” it came out weaker than he intended.

“I may believe the whole story about the end of the world, maybe, probably not, but what was that last part?” Saihara-chan was still staring at him firmly.

“What? The fact that I’m the mastermind? Because I’m the mastermind.” he knew it was probably useless but it was still better than nothing, he could try to buy some more time.

“Bullshit.”

“No, I’m really the master—“

“Bullshit.” Saihara-chan didn’t hesitate for half a second. “You are the mastermind as much as I’m the Ultimate Serial Killer.”

“Well I can’t be sure of that! Maybe you really are the Ultimate—“

“Shut up.” he interrupted him again. “Answer my question.”

“Saihara-chan first you tell me to shut up, then to answer your question, chose one!”

“Kokichi!”

Kokichi fell silent adverting his gaze from him stubbornly. He had nothing more to tell him. He really was not in the mood right now. They remained silent for a long while. Kokichi’s mind was in disarray so he had no idea how much time actually passed, maybe it was only a minute. He could still feel Saihara-chan staring holes in him. The stubborn fool was even more stubborn than he was. A childish, irrational irritation forced him to speak again.

“…Go away…”

“No, I’m not going away.” another answer without a hint of hesitation.

“… What do you want?” Kokichi pouted.

“I already told you. Let’s forget the part about you being the mastermind and the human experiment, whatever that was, you pulled it out of your ass at that moment. It was not even that clever. Whatever, I don’t care. All I want to know is why you took Kaito as a hostage and how were you able to do all this.”

Answers. Answers, answers, answers. That was what Saihara-chan was searching for all the damn time. But was he really ready to receive them?

“Why are you so sure I’m not the mastermind? You don’t have any proof.”
“Because I looked you in the eyes when you told me you were not trying to win the game and you weren’t lying.” Saihara-chan’s tone was still firm.

“That proves nothing, as I’m the mastermind, I don’t need to win the game because—“

“Gosh, Kokichi you’re so confrontational! Would it kill you to give a straight answer for once?”

“You would not be able to understand it anyway. You wouldn’t believe me.” he had no idea why but he decided to be a bit more honest.

“Try me.” Saihara-chan didn’t waver a second.

“I already know.” Kokichi just didn’t want to answer. To be proved wrong, to be believed… it was just too scary.

“Try. Me.” he insisted.

“I can’t have this conversation with him in here anyway. I’m sure the audience is watching us right now. They will eliminate us both or wipe our memories if we start talking about virtual reality in front of them. So, in any case, I simply cannot tell you, Saihara-chan.’

Seeing that Kokichi was not responding Saihara-chan reached up for the hat that was not there anymore, a familiar gesture he did every time he was trying to calm himself down.

“Give me a chance Kokichi! If what you are doing is really for the sake of everyone, then I want to know! I can’t help you like this! I cannot work with you if I don’t understand what you want me to do. Stop trying to manipulate me, just ask me like a normal human being. We can figure out something together if we try! I’m sure you were scared by that view, right? The one beyond the door? Is that why you made Gonta kill Iruma-san? No… that doesn’t really make sense… But… have you lost your hope? Were you trying to make us all realize that the situation was desperate? Please, just explain things to me! Let me help. Trust me!”

“Stupid Saihara-chan,” Kokichi sighed. “Why do you still have it in your heart to forgive me? I killed two people, you know?”

“No, I have not forgiven you. At all. What you did to Gonta was beyond ‘evil’ it was just plain cruel.” Kokichi sensed an incoming ‘but’. “But I know you are trying to help. I just… know.”

“Why?” not another hope speech, please.

“I don’t have a why. It’s just a feeling I have.”

Kokichi sighed again, the stupid Astronaut had rubbed off on him at least.

“A Detective it’s not supposed to say stuff like this. And Gonta said the same before I sent him to die. You have a good precedent ahead of you, I would be feeling totally reassure if I were you.” Kokichi pouted.

“What…?” now he was confused. This expression was much more familiar for Kokichi.

“You want me to trust you? Fine.” Saihara-chan’s eyes widen. “Let’s have a nice chat after we change the scenery a bit, all right? You will probably regret this, I’m telling you.” it was pointless to stay here anyway, Harukawa-chan was not coming clearly.

“Seriously?” Saihara-chan could not believe his ears.
“Sure! Let’s all become the best of friends and defeat the mastermind with the power of friendship and love and hope! Or something.” Kokichi said sarcastically starting to collect all the items around him.

“Kokichi…” Saihara-chan sighed.

“Honestly, my first plan failed because of you, my second plan also failed because of you. I don’t have any better ideas and I can’t do anything else at this point. So, sure, let’s have this little chat. You take responsibility from now on.” he started to move toward the exit of the hanger.

“Wait, what about Kaito? Where is he?” Saihara-chan’s voice was normal again; he had discarded his severe tone.

“The idiot is in the bathroom. Leave him in there, I’m sure little Miss Girlfriend will come and save his ass soon enough. He won’t die.” he said nonchalantly.

‘Not yet at least, he will die later, because of his illness.’

Kokichi left the hanger and Saihara-chan followed.

“Where are we going?” he asked after some time.

“To my Lab.” Kokichi answered curtly.

Kokichi had decided to forfeit his secret lair. After all, he had decided to forfeit his life, or more accurately his chance of ending Danganronpa, so it didn’t matter anymore. Saihara-chan wanted to be trusted? Then he was going to entrust him everything. Completely. He was going to throw all the problems at him and wait for him to solve them. He really wanted to see what he could do better than he could.

“Your Lab? Is it open? Since when?” Saihara-chan was struggling to keep up with his quick pace.

“Since the very beginning. I told you I’m a master at hiding and seek. My Lab fits me. If you could not find it, it’s surely not my fault.” he was being an ass he could admit that, but he was bitter and he was a monster so it was fine.

Reaching the entrance hall undetected was not very easy, Kiibo was walking around the garden and he was not sure he was capable of spotting Miss Girlfriend if she was hidden. Saihara-chan apparently understood the need to be hidden as he tried to make himself as small as possible and he was walking as quietly as he could. Having his arms full, Kokichi asked him to open the secret passage to his Lab. Saihara-chan looked bewildered; he was not expecting the entrance to be in the most visited place.

“The more obvious it is, the more hidden it is.” Kokichi whispered in his ears making him jump.

They walked through the tunnel and Saihara-chan was looking around with curiosity in his eyes. Kokichi wondered what he would think of his Lab, would he like it? He banished the thought, it was stupid, it didn’t matter whatever he would like it or not. Once inside Kokichi turned his back to him and placed down the Bugvacuum and Electro-bombs. He didn’t really want to see him scanning the Lab with his sharp eyes. He was sure he would not like whatever reaction the Detective was going to have. He stretched his arms buying some time.

“Wow, I can sense the danger looking at me from every corner!”

The sarcasm. The sarcasm.
Kokichi turned to face him with a pout.

“You truly are an Evil Supreme Leader. Is that a toy helicopter?” Saihara-chan was smiling.

“Shut up! I never gave my consent for this place!” he was totally pouting.

“Didn’t you said that it fits you?” Saihara-chan was almost smirking.

“That’s not… No. It doesn’t, shut up!” he crossed his arms.

“Well, I think it fits you! You cannot truly take it seriously, just like you.”

“I’m offended! I’m totally offended! How dare you!” he yelled obnoxiously.

“Sorry. That’s not true, I take you seriously. But this place… I cannot, sorry.” he offered an apologetic smile. “On the other hand, I think it fits a more cheerful version of you, I can imagine you playing around with this stuff when you are in a good mood.”

It was true, Kokichi loved that toy helicopter, and the cards they used to play came from here, and there were some cute things here and there but… why was he describing him as if he was a child? Kokichi was offended.

“So… can we talk now?” Saihara-chan returned serious.

“Sure,” Kokichi answered with a snobby attitude, “Let’s have this famous chat.”

He turned on the Bugvacuum.

Chapter End Notes

Next time Somewhere:
Kokichi remembers that this is virtual reality. He weighed his options and chose this one.

Oasis tomorrow.
Having reached a decision, Rantaro could finally sleep.

He had tried to sleep the night before but his mind was too full of thoughts, he had not been able to close his eyes. He woke up early in the morning finally feeling fully rested. Leader was going to fight. Now he was on the same page as all of them, well kinda, as much as he could be with only the information he had from the inside. And there was the doubt if he had remembered the virtual world aspect. Rantaro had a feeling that he had remembered everything. He had no proof, but he wanted to trust his instinct. Laying on his bed, not wanting to get up, he tried to reach the same conclusion that Leader had.

“I’m not going to say anything to the others! I want to win this. I’m the only one who can enjoy this game to the fullest, since I remember that it is one, and I don’t want to die either. I want to make it out of here alive!”

‘I want to win this? Leader would have never said that. This must have been a lie.’

“L’m going to do just that! I’ll place in first place for a week and collect my reward! Buuut I want to keep my request a secret for now!”

‘He wants a prize from the audience? What kind of prize? I can imagine a lot of things but…’

This was really tricky. There were so many options, so many possibilities… What was going in his mind right now? He needed more clues. He got up and took a taxi to the hospital. Once there he asked to meet the doctor that was taking care of the participants. He had to wait in the waiting room for a long while, but he didn’t mind, Rantaro was a patient person. The doctor appeared in the afternoon and led him to a private room.

“Why are you here kid?” he asked with his usual attitude.

“I want a time limit. I want to know precisely how much time Kokichi has left.” he said firmly. “I want to support him for as long as I can but I’ll never put his life in danger. How much time left does he have?”

“Six weeks. Then his health will start to deteriorate,” he looked at his papers. “If you want to know how much he has left before I’ll forcibly disconnect him… I’m giving him ten weeks. This is the best offer I can give you. I’m a doctor before everything else. The Hajime kid convinced me to help you all and I agree with your cause. But my priority will always be to save lives. There will always be another season, another chance.”

Rantaro returned to his apartment deep in thoughts. There will always be another season. Yes, it was true, too true. Rantaro was not selfish; he didn’t want his Leader to suffer all this weight on his own. But at the same time, he was hoping he would create a miracle. Certainly, he could not say he knew all the people in the world, but Kokichi had something in him that set him apart from everyone else. Nagito was right, if there was someone in the world that could end Danganronpa, it was him. Rantaro only wanted to be there for him. He wanted to help him, to share the burden.

Interrupting his thoughts, was Kaede at his door. She smiled when she saw him.
“Are you free? I think I can think clearer with some company, when I’m alone my thoughts just keep going in a circle.”

“Sure, come in.” Rantaro held the door open for her and she walked in with a nod of gratitude. “Have you already eaten?”

She shook her head. Kaede offered to cook with him, Rantaro tried to dissuade her as her fingers were important for playing the piano, she could not risk them with a knife. Kaede laughed and reminded him that she was not going to enter in a piano concert anytime soon. Together they tried to cook a simple salmon dish with herbs. She was pretty clumsy at cutting the herbs, so he asked her to remove the fish bones instead. In the end, they still found a lot of them in the cooked fish and Kaede was rather embarrassed, but Rantaro could not help himself from chuckling at her expression. She pouted at him and he proposed a contest, the one that would find the most boned would win. In ten minutes they were both laughing, counting a pile of fish bones. It was the silliest thing Rantaro ever did, even with his mind filled with memories of children. But he didn’t care one bit. It was fun and she was gorgeous when her cheeks were red from too much laughing.

Danganronpa that night was completely focused on Kaito’s illness. This was surely going to push his popularity higher with the fans. At the very least, Rantaro was now certain that he was neither a Survivor nor a winner. Kaito was already out; it was just a matter of time. He doubted they would throw this in the mix and not do anything about it. Kaito was going to die for sure, sooner or later. Kaede and Rantaro spoke late into the night regarding Kaito’s situation. His illness was probably to build up leverage for Maki, since she clearly liked him. There was a big possibility that she would kill for him. That, or she was going to reach the end of the season. Considering the list of people who were still in the game, they could narrow down the list of potential Survivors if the season was to end normally. Kokichi was on his last season per the rules, Shirogane was the mastermind, Kaito was off the list now. The Survivors would be two between Shuichi, Gonta, Miu, Kiibo, Himiko or Maki. Three of them would become the winners.

They kept talking in circles; there was no other way to narrow down the list more with certainty. There were good arguments for all of them to become something or another. When Rantaro looked up at the wall clock, it was already past midnight.

“Ah, it’s late, I’ll take you back to your apartment.” he got up and extended a hand towards her without thinking.

She stared at it for only a second before taking it and getting up herself. Rantaro tried to let go of her hand but she tightened the grip a little, when Rantaro looked at her in search of an explanation, he discovered that she was blushing and looking away from him. Rantaro blushed himself and walked her to her room hand in hand. He hoped that Kazuichi was sleeping already. They stood in front of the door, neither of them did anything, they just stood in silence. Rantaro was desperately searching for something clever to say when she broke the silence.

“Do you ever have nightmares? About the time inside?” she asked, looking at her feet.

“Yes,” he tried to keep his voice as gentle as possible, “both of my seasons get mixed up in my dreams and most of the times it’s not nice.”

“I dream about you. Dead. All the time.” she looked in the verge of tears.

Rantaro’s heart squeezed painfully and he pulled her into a hug without even realizing it. He caressed her hair gently, not sure if he was allowed to be so close to her but not really caring at that moment. She clenched the back of his shirt sobbing softly.
“You didn’t kill me. It’s not your fault. Stop torturing yourself over it.” he whispered in her ear gently.

“I know that!” her voice was muffled; her face was hidden in his shirt. “It’s not simply that, I… I’ve seen you dead! There was a lot of blood! But now you are here! And you’re alive. But I’ve seen you dead. It’s horrible!”

“I’m sorry…” he had no idea what else to say.

“What are you sorry for, don’t be ridiculous!” at least she raised her head and looked at him with a determinate expression. “Don’t you dare die ever again!”

That was kind of a difficult promise to make but…

“All right, I’ll do my best.” then he went with his instinct without holding back and dared to kiss her on her forehead.

She didn’t pull back or rejected him, she blushed a little, smiling.

“You better!” they pulled apart and she opened her door, and just before closing it, she sent him another smile. “See you tomorrow, Rantaro.”

They saw each other again only ten hours later. Hinata-san had invited them to Chiaki’s apartment. They were all there, except for Ryota who was working.

“We had a very long meeting about Ouma-kun.” Hinata-san started their own meeting. He sent a glare to Nagito, who was poking around Chiaki’s stuff, before continuing. “They are scared of him, he is a variable out of control. Mostly they are afraid he will end the season too soon, they want the fifth phase to happen. Shirogane will not accept anything else; she will kill him herself if she has to. But luckily…” he interrupted himself when he saw Nagito enter Chiaki’s bedroom. “Where are you going?!”

Nagito peeked through the doorframe.

“Hm? I’m just checking what kind of lingerie you like, Hajime.” he said with a straight face.

“Come back here this instant!” Hinata-san was red as a tomato.

“Hey!” Teruteru jumped to his feet. “I wanna see it too!”

“And you keep your hands to yourself!!” said Hinata-san in a high pitch voice.

Despite having promised not to die just ten hours ago, he was dying from too much chuckling; at least Kaede was in the same predicament. Chiaki didn’t seem perturbed at all, she looked like she used to this.

“Degenerate males…” Tenko’s comment closed the incident.

“As I was saying…” Hinata-san cleared his voice. “Luckily, he doesn’t seem to be interested in ending the season right now. After thinking about every possibility and looked at the footage of these last hours I think I know what he will do.” he paused for a moment, Rantaro sensed bad news coming. “He plans to make Gokuhara-kun kill Iruma-san.”

A long astonished silence filled the room.

“What are you talking about?! Leader is not like that!” Kazuichi was the first one to recover. “How
would you know that?!”

“Because,” Hinata-san tried to calm him with a severe tone, “he positioned Gokuhara-kun’s picture in the killer section and he was looking through the fake Neo World Program we have placed inside the computer room. Iruma-san is planning to kill Ouma-kun in there. Therefore, Ouma-kun is taking advantage of her. I don’t know how he will do it, but that’s the only thing that makes sense.”

“’I’ll place in first place for a week’… That’s what he said.” Nagito was smiling. “Yes, this would take him to place first for even more than a week. It’s a good idea!”

“Don’t agree with it, it’s a terrible idea!” shouted Fuyuhiko. “What is he thinking?!”

“This reward he wants must be pretty important for him.” considered Byakuya. “If he is willing to sacrifice people's lives for it, it must be something he cannot achieve by any other means.”

“Bullshit, this is bullshit! There’s no way he would do that!” Fuyuhiko raised his fist.

Suddenly Kaede took his hand and clenched it tight. Rantaro was confused, he studied her hard expression until he realized. Kaede committed her crime, fully aware that it was a crime, to save everyone. Was Kokichi doing something so different?

“Everyone,” he spoke up, “Kokichi remembers that this is virtual reality,” he actually had no proof, but now he was pretty sure, “He weighed his options and chose this one. I’m sure he has a good reason for this. It’s Leader we are talking about! He won’t kill so easily. We need to trust him. And even if we end up being wrong… It’s not like everyone here has a clean conscious, am I right?”

This was a bit too harsh, but true nonetheless. Everyone considered his words for a moment; some more, some less. In the end, they were all on the same page. To trust him was their only real option.

“Let the fireworks begin!” Nagito was smiling.

Chapter End Notes

Next time on Present Side:
It wasn’t like they were partners in crime or anything.

I'm adding a new relationship tag :P
You may have noticed that I'm not adding a lot of notes lately... I don't want to risk spoiling stuff, since I know myself.
And my mind is completely focused on my next works right now so I'd rather only reply to the comments.
But don't forget that I'm grateful to every single one of you always! Don't feel abandoned!
“What’s that?” Saihara-chan asked.

“Bugvacuum. It will keep the audience out of this room.”

“What?” the Detective was confused.

“Are you ready to enter Wonderland, my Alice?” Kokichi said seductively.

Kokichi initially had planned to tell him everything, but he thought better of it. There was a much more clever way to use the situation to his advantage, he could inform Saihara-chan and keep the programmers in the dark. At least for a while, he was sure it would be difficult to determine what he was going to do by only looking at the code. Without the cameras, there were things even they would have trouble seeing. Assuming they were not reading his mind, but that was highly unlikely. He had to take it slow, if he rushed too much, he would only scare Saihara-chan. Not that it would be a major problem, Kokichi had given up after all, but still being stupid was not a talent of his.

Kokichi started to tell everything about his story, starting from his first season. He only skipped everything related to the virtual world. The whole explanation took a long time, but Saihara-chan never interrupted. He was listening attentively with a hand over his mouth. At some point, Kokichi got tired of standing and sat on his chair. He kept telling his story as he was spinning in his swivel chair. The programmers had forgotten to add the sense of vertigo. This was pretty cool.

“Can you stop it, please? You are making me want to puke in your place.” was the first thing he commented after he finished talking. Kokichi placed a foot on the floor to stop the spinning. “Thank you. Now… this story is pretty crazy.”

“If you don’t believe me, it’s fine.” Kokichi shrugged.

“No, I believe you. I think. The whole thing about technology that modifies our memory is a bit difficult to accept, but I have seen the flashback lights myself so I can’t call you a liar.”

“Is that supposed to be a joke, Saihara-chan?” Kokichi asked with a raised eyebrow.

“Are you alright?” he asked getting closer to him. Kokichi raised his eyebrow even higher. “You said that you had a headache and that it made your memories come back. That must have been tough.”

“Seriously? Even after everything I did, you still have it in you to ask me if I’m okay?” Kokichi sighed theatrically.

“I still think that you should have relied on us, but… you tried your best, right?” Saihara-chan smiled. “You weren’t lying when you said that you are taking responsibility for all of us. For that I’m grateful.”

Kokichi’s throat clenched painfully. It was one of the usual mushy feel-good crap that people threw around like candies, but he could not stop himself from feeling touched by it. He was not after some recognition or praise, yet it felt stupidly good nonetheless. For the first time, Kokichi felt really glad that his plan had failed, now he could stop trying so hard. He was so tired. His body was so cold all
the time. He wanted to close his eyes and sleep. He wanted Saihara-chan to solve all the problems for him. Kokichi had never felt so weak before and he had no idea why he was feeling this way now.

“Kokichi?”

Kokichi jumped, startled. He had not realized it, but he had actually closed his eyes and had was about to fall asleep.

“What the hell?”

“Kokichi? What’s wrong, you look very pale. Are you tired? Feeling sick?” Saihara-chan grabbed his arm to make sure he would not fall over.

“Ah…” he tried to sound cheerful. “I shouldn’t have spun that much, my head is spinning like crazy!”

It was a lie but a plausible one, Saihara-chan fell for it. He helped him up.

“Don’t you have a place to lie down here?” he asked while looking around.

“Oooh! Trying to slip into my bed, I see!” he teased him. Saihara-chan tensed up, blushing slightly. “I had no idea you were trying to flirt with me, you should have made it clearer! But I can understand, I’m extremely sexy!”

Saihara-chan was fighting something internally; Kokichi suspected that he had just too many answers he wanted to give. This situation was playing right to his alley. He pointed at the car.

“I sleep in there, like a true Evil Supreme Leader!” he declared confidently.

“Like a true idiot, you mean…” Saihara-chan sighed, unimpressed. “That’s not a healthy way to sleep… How many nights have you slept in there?”

“No idea.” he tried to end the conversation. Kokichi’s last concern was his health.

“Wait for me here.” Saihara-chan started to walk toward the exit.

“W-where are you going?” Kokichi’s heart skipped a beat, betraying him. He was not concerned.

Saihara-chan stared at him with a strange expression. Kokichi could not read it.

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“Like a true idiot, you mean…” Saihara-chan sighed, unimpressed. “That’s not a healthy way to sleep… How many nights have you slept in there?”

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“Don’t worry,” he said after a moment, his voice was a bit softer, “I’m just going to bring a mattress from the warehouse. I’ve seen a folding mattress that fills with water, you can use that.”

Kokichi had seen it too, a long time ago, but he had forgotten all about it. His mind was starting to play tricks on him, he should have remembered that. Saihara-chan returned soon enough with a blue folded mattress under his arm, he went into the bathroom to fill it. Kokichi helped him, dragging it in the middle of the circular room.

“Why in the center you can place it against a wall or—“

Saihara-chan never got to finish his question. Kokichi plopped down on the mattress and dragged him down with him hugging him. Saihara-chan panicked for a second losing all coordination and tense like a rock.

“What are you doing?!”
“I’m helping you slip into my bed! As I promised!” he didn’t promise anything, but who cares?

“What?! No, I’m not--!” Kokichi interrupted him by grabbing his right wrist and clench it with enough strength to hurt. He stared hard into Saihara-chan’s eyes. “What are you--?!"

Kokichi’s grip tightened again, signaling him to shut up. The last thing he needed now was to alert the programmers that he was going to do something important. Saihara-chan stared back, asking a ton of questions with his eyes.

“Now, my beloved, we have the whole room all to ourselves, right? The annoying audience is gone, we can do dirty stuff!” he shook his head, despite his cheerful tone he was not smiling. Saihara-chan understood that he was faking it, but he could not get a read on Kokichi’s intentions. “But, I’m tired! Cuddle me until I fall asleep! We can talk about dirty stuff tomorrow, okay?”

Kokichi got closer to him, but not close enough to actually cuddle with him. Hoping that Saihara-chan’s talent was at least a little bit real, he started to write slowly on his chest. Saihara-chan’s eyes widened, not understanding what he was doing at first. Kokichi insisted with another word. Finally Saihara-chan seemed to catch the trick. Kokichi stared firmly into his eyes, making sure he was following him. He had a lot to say and the faster the better.

Kokichi was not sure that the programmers could understand what he was communicating through the code with all those little movements. Maybe they would decipher it sooner or later, but he was sure that it would at least be a few days. He had time to at least let Saihara-chan reflect on the situation and try to find a solution. Talking or writing on a paper would be easy for them to track, writing on someone’s chest was definitely harder. Kokichi made sure to add some casual movement and caress here and there to make it even harder.

When his writing speed got really fast, Saihara-chan started to write on Kokichi’s chest ‘repeat’ from time to time, but Kokichi refused to slow down. Explaining the Neo World Program like this was one of the trickiest things Kokichi had ever done, but it was worth the trouble. Saihara-chan’s expression was filling with more and more confusion as he went on. Kokichi knew just how unbelievable all of this would seem. He had decided to take the risk. Even if he would refuse to believe him, his situation could not be any worse than this. When he finally finished with the basic explanation, he suddenly pushed Saihara-chan off the mattress.

“Wow, you suck at cuddling! Come back when you have improved!” he stuck his tongue to him.

Saihara-chan got up from the floor slowly. They stared at each other for a while, and then Kokichi turned on the other side showing him his back. He curled up in a ball, even more cold and tired than before. For a long time, no one moved or spoke. When Kokichi heard Saihara-chan walking away from the mattress, he realized he had not told him to not reveal his position to anyone or even to keep all this a secret. He was going to leave and go back to his friends, wasn’t he? He was going to find a solution with them.

Kokichi had no right to ask him to keep the secret or anything. His role now was only to hand over the information to Saihara-chan, what he was going to do with it was his own business. It wasn’t like they were partners in crime or anything.

Kokichi closed his eyes.

He didn’t want to just lay there for hours and wait to discover his next move.

He was going to sleep.
He was tired.

“I’m going to my room to grab some blankets. You look cold. I’ll be back soon.”

Stupid, foolish, trusting Saihara-chan.

Chapter End Notes

Next time Somewhere:
Wait, wait, this is a family reunion, so you are definitely in the right place!

Oasis tomorrow, as always after a Present Side.
"Thank you."

"Hmm? For what?" Rantaro asked her, they were in front of her door.

"For defending me. I mean, I know you were defending him, but you thought of me, right?" Kaede was looking him in the eyes. He didn’t want to answer. He didn’t want to admit that he had forgotten to take her feelings into consideration. "Thank you. It’s almost like you completely forgot about my crime. I failed, but it was only bad luck, I could have killed you. My hands are not clean. But for this very reason, I can truly understand what Kokichi is thinking. Choosing to murder to save others is very difficult. When he comes back, make sure you greet him with all your love, okay?"

"Sure, don’t worry." he thought about hugging her again, but he was not sure it was the right thing to do.

She looked at her feet for a moment then waved at him and entered her apartment. He went to bed feeling uneasy. He was safe now, in the outside world, and it had been easy to welcome all of them, but some had indeed dirtied their hands in the virtual world. What was he doing, questioning Kokichi’s intentions? He should know better than this.

The doorbell woke him up from a restless sleep. He was trying to get dress but he had to throw something half-way decent on and open the door since the doorbell was ringing like crazy.

"Who is it? If it’s you Ibuki, I’m gonna karate-chop you, be read—"

"Yo, little brother! Still a sleepyhead, I see!"

Rantaro stared at his sister with his mouth open. How did she find him?

"What are you doing here?"

"I asked your friend, Chiaki!" she smiled proudly like she had accomplished a huge feat. "Let me tell you, that girl has some serious lady balls! She is capable of handling all of us relatives in one hand and all of you guys in the other! She’s got multi-tasking down like a pro!"

Yukiko entered without waiting to be invited. He offered her breakfast, in the meantime, he sent a text message to Chiaki: Thank you. The girl answered almost instantly ‘you’re welcome’. Smiling, Rantaro put away his phone. Yukiko asked him about everything, about the Necronomicon, about what they were doing, and about Kokichi. Rantaro saw an interesting opportunity.

"Hey, sis? Can you become my lab rat for a moment?" he asked her. After noticing her expression he lifted an eyebrow. "What?"

"Nothing!" she had a smirk on her face. "It’s just that it’s been three years since you called me ‘sis’! That’s all! Go for it! I’m a good lab rat! You probably don’t remember, but you practiced your cooking skill on me all the time!" she gave him a thumbs up.

"Okay…” was he a horrible cook before or something? “So, about Kokichi. Does he keeps you entertained?”
“Totally! He is the most interesting one, if not, a bit obnoxious at times!” she nodded three times. “Long live the Liar King!”

“Do you want him to live long then?” he kept the ball rolling.

“Obviously! Without him, we can only look forward to Kaito and Maki flirting! There’s nothing bad about that, but, variety is better! You know? Not to mention the boy Detective shines more when he is together with him. Usually, he is a bit too gloomy.” she crossed her arms.

“Would you vote for him as your favorite character?”

“Already did!” she winked.

“Would you like it if he committed a murder?” now the difficult part.

“Hmm….” she closed her eyes, considering. “No, not really. I mean, that would spice up the game a lot. Between his little bond with the Detective, and the fact that he is as smart as a button … That would probably be the trial of the century! But no… I don’t want him to murder anyone. I don’t want him to die, even if it would be better for him to leave that world. But most importantly, I don’t want him to ruin himself. He is such a cute kid.”

“Would you hate the season if he committed a murder?” the most important question.

“Yes. But, that would not stop anyone from watching. That’s not nearly enough. And honestly, I would hate it because I’m emotionally attached to him since he is your friend. As a neutral spectator, I would only feel thrilled at the idea. For example, Maki killing would not upset me. So, little bro, Kokichi killing someone will not end Danganronpa.” she was being very honest.

“Thank you.” she started to relax, Rantaro was expecting just that. “What if he makes Gonta kill Miu?”

“What?! That’s… Would he do something like that?!” she was clearly taken aback, as Rantaro imagined. “That would make me go crazy! Like… I would watch Danganronpa every day and think about it all the time! That’s crazy! An incredible plot twist! Wow, I can already imagine Shuichi’s reaction… Ohh, brother. That’s what you call a masterpiece!” she was half excited, half horrified.

“Hey, you know what? You were right. You are a wonderful lab rat!” he smiled and she laughed loudly.

“Hope I was useful!” she stuck her tongue at him. “But, would he really do that?” now she was suddenly serious.

“Yes, it’s already happening. He has already a plan of some sort. He needs the popularity prize.”

“Holy guacamole!”

“What…? What kind of swearing is that!?” Rantaro could not stop the laughter.

The doorbell rang, interrupting them. Rantaro opened the door and on the other side was Kaede, smiling.

“Hi, am I bothering you? I was thinking…” she interrupted herself when she saw Yukiko peek from behind the corner. “Ah, hmm, you are busy, I see… Hmm… I better go…”

Before Rantaro could stop her, he had a clear impression that she just misunderstood something,
Yukiko sprinted forward and grabbed her arm.

“Wait, wait, this is a family reunion, so you are definitely in the right place!” she dragged Kaede inside.

Rantaro didn’t have the time to react properly, his sister was a frigging storm. Yeah, that’s what she was. In less than three minutes they were both seated in the kitchen while she was preparing tea. It was like this was her house and they were the guests. Kaede was sending him a lot of silent questions.

“Kaede-chan!” she was smiling happily. “I’m Yukiko, Ryoji’s older sister! I came to visit! I’m totally not her girlfriend, all right?” Kaede blushed and started to deny that she ever thought that. Yukiko laughed. “You are a really nice girl, I’m sure mom and dad will love you too, come visit us sometimes, okay? It’s best to get to know you a little before you marry him!”

“SIS!” Rantaro yelled in a high pitch voice.

“Ryo-chan, I know you best, you would have taken a year to confess had I left this to you, just make out alre—“

“AHH! Kaede, you have an appointment right now, right? I’ll walk you to the door! Let’s go!” he grabbed Kaede’s hand and hurried to the door. “I’m sorry! Really, I’m sorry! I dunno what’s gotten into her, I mean she is always like that, but—“

“Your sister is nice. Don’t apologize.” she was looking at her feet. “And it’s kind of true that you are taking an eternity…”

‘Wait, what?’

“Called it!” was heard from the kitchen.

“Shut up! Don’t eavesdrop on us!” he yelled at her from the entrance.

Kaede was muffling her laughter with a hand.

“I like your sister, say hi to her for me! I’ll see you another day, all right?” she smiled and closed the door.

Rantaro returned to the kitchen and sent a glare in his sister’s direction.

“What? I got you a girlfriend, you should thank me!” she was stuffing her face with cookies.

Rantaro could only sigh and forgive her, she was kinda right after all.

The next day, inside the studio, Rantaro mentally prepared himself for the task ahead. Tonight, they would definitely show Kokichi announcing his murder to everyone by moving Gonta’s picture on his whiteboard. Shirogane was not going to be silent about that. She was going to pester him with nasty questions for sure. He needed to help Leader, so he had to make this murder appealing to the audience. This was not going to be an easy night.

“Everyone, good evening!”

Rantaro was taken by surprise when he discovered that Shirogane was not present that night. She had not been able to leave the Neo World Program. The man in the blue suit was the one that greeted the audience and the two usual guests. First, they presented the results for the popularity poll of the
week, Shuichi was first, Kokichi second and Kaito third. Maki was now fourth, surpassing Miu. Kaito’s illness surely had played a role in that.

The footage showed a lot of random scenes between all of the participants. They were now well familiar with each other; they were talking a lot more, despite their clear tiredness toward the situation. All except for Miu, who was spending all her time alone, she had become paranoid after the last flashback light, and Kokichi for obvious reasons. Then the moment came. Rantaro, who had watched enough episodes and taken part in half of them, was now aware of some signals one had to look out for. In particular, there was one that informed the host that the footage for the day was about to end. The signal was necessary in order for him to prepare some topics of discussion to go over with the guests.

When they showed Kokichi, the signal was given. This was the last footage for the day. There was still half an hour before the end of the show for the day. As expected, Kokichi’s actions made all the spectators on the studio start to murmur loudly.

“Wow, this is a surprise! Is our Leader going to do something with Gonta?” said the host enthusiastically.

“He is planning to make Gonta murder someone, isn’t it obvious?” Nagito’s voice was almost bored.

Rantaro locked eyes with him, trying to read his mind and understand how he needed to play along. Sometimes, he wished Nagito would be a bit more straightforward and discuss the plan beforehand rather than having him try to read his mind. It hasn’t been working very well.

“Wow, for real?!” the host was overly exaggerated as always. “Gonta is certainly gullible, but would he really commit a murder in Kokichi’s place?”

“Gonta is not so gullible, we don’t know yet if he will—“ suddenly Nagito interrupted him.

“Kokichi is a Supreme Leader and a master in psychology, I’m sure he has a good plan prepared.” he nodded almost imperceptibly. So he wanted him to play the role of the opposition? Rantaro could get behind this easily.

“We don’t even know if this is what it is. Maybe he has realized something we haven’t. Maybe he noticed something particular in Gonta and Kokichi suspect him as a potential murder.” Nagito wanted to make the audience hooked with wonder, right? “Or maybe he is just trying to mess around. You never know with him.”

“A smart guy like him would not fool around with something like this. Unless you think that his personality has changed that much?”

The host was looking at them with his mouth open; showing an expression of genuine curiosity.

“It’s the opposite! It’s because I believe in him, that I don’t think he will commit a murder!” Rantaro saw a spark in Nagito’s eyes. He was doing good then.

“Ah, now that’s sounds interesting! How about we bet? Let’s see if Ouma Kokichi will make Gonta a murderer or not.” Nagito smiled amiably. “What do you say?”

“Sure, let’s make a bet.”
Next time on Present Side:
Kokichi, you are so stupid sometimes!
Kokichi suddenly woke up.

Saihara-chan froze, staring at him.

“Sorry, I was trying to not wake you up. Go back to sleep.” he said softly.

Kokichi rubbed his eyes, he didn’t realize he had fallen asleep. Slowly he discovered what woke him, Saihara-chan was trying to cover him with the blanket he brought from his room. Normally, he would take the blanket from him and do it himself or at least make some stupid joke, but now, he was not feeling up to it. He just waited in silence for him to finish. Saihara-chan sat on the mattress next to him, staring at nothing in particular.

“What do we do now?” he asked after confirming that Kokichi was still awake.

Kokichi shifted slightly, trying to wrap the blanket closer around him for more warmth. It didn’t work. He tried to think with his sluggish mind, but soon gave up. He had given this task to Saihara-chan, he was not going to think anymore.

“Do whatever you want with this information. I’ve given it to you.”

“Do you think I should talk to the others?” Saihara-chan asked.

Of course, he would go immediately in that direction. He had grown, but he still wanted to rely on them for difficult things. But Kokichi was not going to judge anymore. This was not going to work, the programmers would notice and everything would go badly, but he was not going to say anything. Saihara-chan was not a child, he could make his own decisions. He shrugged.

“That doesn’t seem like a good idea, they wouldn’t believe me, especially since this info came from you….” see? He was not a child nor stupid, he didn’t need Kokichi. “What were you trying to do by the way? You never explained that. I understand why you had to do all that to get the prize, even if I’ll never accept it, but then what?”

“It doesn’t matter anymore.” Kokichi’s voice was almost a sigh.

“Kokichi, I need your help. Your brain works better and faster than mine, I need your opinion and input. I can’t do this alone, I’m not you.” he inched closer, looking at his face from above.

Kokichi shook his head. He didn’t have the will or the energy to explain that he was done. He just wanted to sleep now. He closed his eyes trying to convey the message wordlessly. A hand was placed gently on his forehead. Kokichi opened his eyes again. Saihara-chan was still looking at him, a bit worried and a bit sad.

“You’re ill, aren’t you? You’re freezing and look horrible. Is the blanket not enough? Probably not…” he removed his hand and looked around in search of something. Kokichi could explain that as long as the programmers did not decide to give the blanket a warming function, it would not work, but he couldn’t without revealing too much, nor did he wanted to. “I don’t really know what to do, but…”
Saihara-chan started to move around a bit. Kokichi wanted to tell him to stay put so he could sleep, but he tried to endure ignoring him for the sake of conserving energy, he closed his eyes tightly to stop the damn light. He had to open them once again when he realized what Saihara-chan was doing. The boy was lying down next to him, still above the blanket, and was trying to wrap his arm around him and pulling him into a strange half-hug. Saihara-chan immediately removed the arm when Kokichi moved to turn around and face him. They stared at each other for a while.

“No good? Should I go away?” he was clearly uncomfortable.

“Whatever, just stay put.” Kokichi conceded.

Why he wanted to hug a murderer was beyond his comprehension. But Saihara-chan was clearly not okay in the head. That had been already established. He tried the half hug again and this time Kokichi let him find a good position. Or so he thought, Saihara-chan started to lightly follow the curve of his back and ended up poking one of his thighs. Kokichi opened his eyes once again and stared at him with an unimpressed expression that he hoped was conveying the message ‘what the fuck?’.

“Hmm, sorry…” for some reason Saihara-chan was fighting a smile. “It’s just… you are real.”

“Huh?!” now that was unexpected.

“I don’t know how to explain it…” he was looking away, still fighting a smile, he was losing the fight. “Until now, you were so… incorporeal. You were like an ethereal creature, like a ghost, see?” no, Kokichi was not seeing. “You have that aura around you that says ‘don’t touch me’, and on top of that, you are so pale and small. I don’t think I ever saw anyone touch you, except in violent cases, like with Harukawa-san or Kaito. It’s like… you keep people away, you don’t look like something that one can touch.”

“What are you even blabbing about, you touched me a bunch of times already.” while he was saying that, Kokichi realized that it was true. Kokichi was not used to physical contact except in violent situations, like he said. Saihara-chan was almost the only person there that had touched him.

“True.” Saihara-chan readily conceded. “But there was always an objective. Like the time I cleaned your cut? There was always another reason, I never touched you casually, like a hand on the shoulder or something?” he was desperately trying to make some kind of point. “Kaito does that with me all the time, I got used to it. That’s when I realized that I could never imagine myself touching you casually the same way. Yet, here I am now. I was just surprised, you’re actually real. Good.”

Saihara-chan closed the discussion in a hurry with an embarrassed expression. And for that experiment, he needed to poke his thigh? Definitely, Saihara-chan was not okay in the head. He sighed deeply and finally fell into a deep sleep.

When he woke up from a dreamless sleep, they were still in that position. Saihara-chan was sleeping right next to him. Kokichi took his sweet time stretching, but only a little bit as to not disturb the other boy. Saihara-chan shifted position a little, but didn’t wake up. Without anything to do and feeling much better, he found himself staring at his face, and studying his features. Yes, Saihara-chan was definitely his type. Too bad he didn’t deserve him anymore.

In the following minutes his mind betrayed him. He started to realize that he was glad the one that had attacked him in the hangar was Saihara-chan. His plan was ruined, but now he was much more relaxed and light. The responsibility was not his anymore. Not only that, Saihara-chan proved to be much more open-minded and smarter than what Kokichi initially thought. He accepted the truth about the whole situation much faster than he ever imagined. And being the amazing person he was,
he even decided to stick with him longer than necessary. Now if only he would…

Kokichi’s mind reached an epiphany. He was not new to this type of enlightenment, but this was the strongest yet. A plan. An actual plan that had his focus on Saihara-chan and not him. This could work. This could actually frigging work, if only… No way. There was no way, this was stupid, no way Saihara-chan would ever agree to that. He’d better scrap that plan.

“What are you thinking?” Saihara-chan was awake.

“I was just thinking that we could create the best trash in history if you could be my boyfriend and ally. But since you are neither, I guess we’re stuck.” Kokichi shrugged sitting up.

Saihara-chan blushed immediately. Odd reaction.

“O-oh, is that so?” he sat up as well. “What do you mean?”

“Nah, nah, you will never able to lie that well, forget it!” he got on his feet, reaching for the food supply.

“Explain it to me before you tell me to forget it!” Saihara-chan mimicked him.

“Right now, the Bugvacuum is activated so the audience can’t see what we’re doing,” only the programmers, he added in his mind. Saihara-chan nodded, he had caught the meaning. “You’ll have to keep the act on for them as well for this to work. You are not capable of doing this for a long period, you see, the act must look as natural as possible. If I stop the Bugvacuum now, it will be evident we are not a couple. Just forget it.”

Saihara-chan seemed conflicted for some reason, then he made a determinate expression.

“I can do it. I’m positive.” he said with a lot of confidence.

“No way! Your lies are pretty shitty!” Kokichi munched on an energy bar.

“Then tell me how I should prove it.”

Why would he even want that? Kokichi was almost joking. There was just no way that he was capable of executing his plan. Nor was he supposed to offer going along with it.

“Well, could you kiss me if I say it’s necessary?” Kokichi waved the bar around, teasing him.

There was just no way he would want to go ahead after this. A kiss was not really necessary, Kokichi was just messing around. Saihara-chan’s expression collapsed into one of complete embarrassment. He looked around for an escape route. Kokichi put the rest of the bar in his mouth, preparing for a new discussion. Then Saihara-chan looked eyes with him and clenched his fists.

There was just no way he was still considering this. Kokichi swallowed the bar and reached for a water bottle.

Saihara-chan took a step toward him.

There was just no way. He drank quickly, in case the other wanted to slap him or something. It was better to get hit without having water still in his mouth. He didn’t fancy getting all wet, there was no shower in there.

Saihara-chan was now in front of him.
There was just no way. He opened his mouth to say something, not knowing exactly what.

Saihara-chan’s face suddenly got a lot closer.

There was just no—

He hesitated for a moment, then placed a hand on his cheek.

THERE WAS—

Saihara-chan closed his eyes and started to inch closer and closer.

“What are you doing?!” Kokichi half pushed him away and half-stumbled on his own feet in an attempt to escape.

“I’m kissing you, what does it look like?” Saihara-chan was red and looked a bit angry.

“But…?!” he took a deep breath, calming down. “I get that I’m irresistible and everything, but I didn’t take you for the type to jump at every opportunity!”

“You asked me to!” now he was definitely angry.

“So what? Would you kiss anyone just because they asked?” actually Kokichi was a bit interested in his answer.

“No, I wouldn’t!” Saihara-chan hid his face in his hands. “Kokichi, you are so stupid sometimes!”

Now it was Kokichi’s turn to blush furiously, his mind in total disarray.

‘No way he meant something like that! No-frigging-way!’

“If I’m getting on board with this plan or whatever this is…” Saihara-chan continued, looking everywhere except in his direction. “It’s because I don’t need to act.”

There was a long silence. Kokichi was burying himself alive in denial, while Saihara-chan, no, Shuichi, was staring at the floor, beet red.

‘No-way-no-way-no-way-no-way! But wait… it doesn’t matter if he is telling the truth or not. Well, not for the plan at least. If he is willing to try… there is nothing to lose…’

Shutting all his thoughts in a box about whether that pseudo-confession was real or not, Kokichi readied himself for the new task ahead. He slowly made his way towards Shuichi, giving him time to back away or escape. He looked at him in alarm, but didn’t move an inch. They stared at each other for a moment, then Kokichi closed the distance. He hugged the boy in front of him and put his mouth close to his ear.

“Oh, but you’ll need to act…” he whispered.

He could feel Shuichi’s tension.

“Tell me, Saihara-chan, are you familiar with Romeo and Juliet?”

Chapter End Notes
Next time Somewhere:
I’m going to make sure you will never be able to set foot on the Danganronpa propriety ever again.
Somewhere

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

-Holy shit, we have an epic battle here? Bullshit Power against Big Brother Power?!-

-I’m not missing this one!-

-Is the betting site ready yet?!-

Rantaro stared at the comments from the audience that were scrolling across the screen one by one. They looked fired up for the alleged bet of theirs. There was nothing to bet, Rantaro was going to lose and he knew it. Still, this was a good way to make Leader shine. Now they would talk about him for days. At the end of the night, Nagito nodded in his direction, staring at him. It was almost like he was judging him about something.

The next day there was no news from Chiaki or Hinata-san, so he went to the studio during the afternoon as usual. While he was eating dinner, he received a text message from Kaede.

-Are you at the studio? I knocked on your door but you weren’t there-

He quickly typed a response.

-Yeah I did. Is there something wrong?-

The answer was almost immediate.

-No, I just wanted to say that you did a great job yesterday. Maybe next time I can come too?-

-Sure, we can talk tomorrow :)-

Rantaro put his phone away, his heart was a lot lighter. They had not talked since the hurricane Yukiko was over at his place. He was a little scared she was avoiding him or something. They had to talk a bit, Rantaro needed to express his feeling for her properly. This was the first time he had to do something like this, but Rantaro was not a coward. He was mature enough to know that there was no shame in being inexperienced, even if it was awkward. If he had understood Kaede’s character correctly, she would not mind him being a little clumsy. She looked kinda like the clumsy type herself, if he had to be honest.

Inside the studio, seated in place of Nagito, was a potential unpleasant surprise. Tsumiki Mikan smiled at him and waved a hand. Rantaro had a chill down his spine. Her smile looked normal enough, but he could sense that it was fake. This was different from Kokichi’s fake smiles, they were hiding just a sense of mystery. Her smile was hiding something unpleasant. Rantaro returned the wave with a smile of his own.

Shirogane greeted them with particular enthusiasm. Rantaro only realized too late why she was in such high spirits. Tsumiki Mikan smiled at him and waved a hand. Rantaro had a chill down his spine. Her smile looked normal enough, but he could sense that it was fake. This was different from Kokichi’s fake smiles, they were hiding just a sense of mystery. Her smile was hiding something unpleasant. Rantaro returned the wave with a smile of his own.

Shirogane greeted them with particular enthusiasm. Rantaro only realized too late why she was in such high spirits. This was a trap. Mikan was that one person that was inclined to hate Kokichi and badmouth him. Shirogane was happy to have her, so they could put Kokichi in a bad light. Mikan was really eager to say that she had ‘always suspected him as the murderer type’. She said that Kokichi held the high moral ground with her during her trial and now he was going to do something just as bad. Rantaro tried to defend Kokichi, to stick up for his story, and said that he had not done anything yet and in any case he did not remember the previous season. They didn’t let him talk. He
was overwhelmed by their joint effort in putting everything in the worst possible light. Rantaro wondered why today, of all the days, Nagito had to be absent.

The answer was right outside of the studio. Nagito was waiting for him right there, leaning against a wall.

“What are you doing here? Why you were not there?” Rantaro asked a bit more aggressively than intended.

“Because I knew she was going to be there and I wanted to see just how well would you be able to hold your ground by yourself. Let me tell you, not very well.” he answered smiling.

“Well thank you very much! You could’ve helped!” Rantaro’s pride was hurt.

“I’m going to. You need to be much better than this. You are a terrible liar. Tomorrow, I’m going to be at your apartment. We are going to start training.” with that he left.

Rantaro remembered way too late that he had already agreed to meet with Kaede. Nagito had already disappeared from view. Once back in his apartment, he pondered for quite some time if he should tell Kaede to postpone their meeting, but in the end, he decided to leave it be. With some luck, Nagito would go away before she would knock on his door. Rantaro remembered too late, once again, that luck was Nagito’s power, not his.

The guy entered his apartment as if it was his own house and took possession of the living room.

“So, I’m going to teach you how to lie as if you were telling the truth.” he greeted.

“How to lie? What? Why?” Rantaro was confused.

“Because we are going to keep the audience’s excitement high by dueling. We are going to fight for who is right: you or me. So, since you are going to have to defend Kokichi from my accusations while knowing that I’m right, you need to be able to lie a lot better than what you can do now.” he said nonchalantly.

“Wait a second, if you are so good at lying, why don’t you take my role and lie in my place?” Rantaro tried to bring the conversation back to a more reasonable level.

It was probably the wrong thing to say. Nagito suddenly got closer to him, staring at him with crazy eyes filled with darkness.

“Because, my dear Big Brother…” his voice was low, dangerous. “I’m Komaeda Nagito. The human garbage who thinks the worst outcome is the best one. Why would I, a being filled with despair, be positive and hope for the best? Why would I pray for everyone’s safety? There is no hope without despair, if he kills someone it’s a great thing in my book.”

They stared at each other. Rantaro didn’t want to break eye contact, he didn’t want to lose to him. Nagito smirked.

“See? You are the positive one! Always filled with hope, trust and all that great stuff. The audience will never accept an exchange in roles. You have to be the one to protect Kokichi from my accusations!” he was suddenly cheerful again.

The guy had some serious mood swings.

“All right, I get it…” Rantaro sighed admitting defeat. “How am I supposed to do this?”
“From now on you have to lie about everything. Got that? We are going to have a conversation. I’m going to ask questions and talk about things. No matter what it is, always lie.” Nagito sat on his sofa, Rantaro didn’t want to sit next to him, so he resigned himself to stand.

As they were about to start, the doorbell rang. It was Kaede.

Rantaro apologized to her and told her he was having a training session of some sort with Nagito. She asked if she could assist. Nagito appeared from behind the corner and invited her in. Rantaro rolled his eyes. This wasn’t his house, he could not invite people in as he pleased. Not that he was going to complain though. She sat down on the other end of the sofa after greeting Nagito. The guy only gave her a nod, he was too busy contemplating something with a calculating expression on his face.

“Let’s see… I think your favorite color is yellow.” Nagito said out of the blue.

“Yes, that’s right, why?” he answered without thinking.

Nagito got up very angry all of a sudden.

“No, your favorite color is purple, remember?” his tone was very aggressive.

Finally Rantaro realized, the lesson had started already.

“Yeah, I was lying, I hate yellow. But I don’t like purple either, I’d rather go with black.” he said with as much confidence as he could.

Black was his least favorite color. Rantaro was a colorful person, the lively the color, the better.

“Is that so?” Nagito sat down, calm again. Kaede was looking between the two, confused. “Then why you don’t have any object of that color? I see only colorful items around.”

‘Damn, how do I answer to this?’

“That’s… just because this apartment was already furnished, I didn’t want to waste money on new items. I’m pretty stingy.” he hoped this was good enough.

“Oh, I see! But why are your clothes mostly green, yellow and cream?” he was really determined to uncover his lie, was he not?

“You are not looking hard enough, see?” Rantaro pointed his t-shirt. “This is striped. Green and black. To wear clothes with only black on it would make me emo, am I right?” he smiled.

“Hmm, I guess I’ll give up on this one.” Nagito smiled. “I’ll give your performance a 6/10. You could have done a lot better. Still, it’s good enough for dimwits. I’ll show you.” he turned to face Kaede. “What’s his favorite color?”

Kaede looked at him, surprised to have been called out.

“Err… Black…?” she looked even more confused.

“See?!?” Nagito smiled proudly. “It works on dimwits!”

“She is not a dimwit! Don’t insult her!” Rantaro took a step forward.

“Oh? So you think she is a dimwit for real?” he raised an eyebrow.
‘Fuck! I’m supposed to lie all the time! No, wait a second…’

“No way I’m going to say that in front of her!” Rantaro was painfully aware he was making himself easily misunderstood.

“Oh, so you are not going to lie if it hurt someone you care about.” his voice had a very clear edge. “Then don’t show your face at the studio anymore, you are useless, you can’t help Kokichi!”

Rantaro clenched his fists a few times, frustration overwhelming him.

“Thanks Kaede, your assistance is not needed anymore, you can go.” suddenly Nagito got up again urging Kaede to the door.

The girl looked at both of them, completely and utterly confused.

“Hey, don’t throw her out from my apartment!” he was losing his patience for maybe the first time in his life.

“I-I think I’m gonna go…” Kaede sensed the danger and decided to comply to calm both down. “I’ll come back tomorrow okay?” he sent him an unsure look.

Rantaro hated this.

“I’m very truly sorry. I’ll explain everything, I promise.” he accompanied her to the door and sent her his best apologetic smile.

After the door was closed, Rantaro stared at Nagito with hate.

“Thank you for having volunteer yourself!” he was happy as ever, maybe even more.

“What?” Rantaro didn’t care if it sounded very rude.

“You just said: ‘I’ll explain everything, I promise’. Which mean you won’t. Right?” Nagito was looking at him with a predatory smile.

Rantaro’s heart sunk when he realized just how big he had screw up.

“No, you can’t force me to break a promise! I’m not going to hurt her like this! There is absolutely no way!” he shouted, not bothering to contain the panic in his voice.

Nagito smile became maniacal.

“Good! I look forward to this performance! I want to see how do you intend to hurt her!” he got closed to him. Rantaro was frozen on the spot. “You better not run away from this, got it? You won’t abandon your beloved little brother, right? If you do escape from this…” he whispered in his ear. “I’m going to make sure you will never be able to set foot on the Danganronpa propriety ever again.”

Nagito left.

Rantaro remained frozen there for a very long time.

Chapter End Notes
Next time on Present Side:
Two families fighting each other. A forbidden love born in a tense atmosphere… Secret meetings during the night… Exchanging secrets under a full moon…Does this ring a bell?

I want to thank you once again for the kudos/comments, while I'm relatively new to writing this is definitely the most amount of participation I ever had, I'm very, very happy!
Thank you <3
“Romeo and Juliet?”

Kokichi moved away from his face and intertwined his hands behind his neck.

“Two families fighting each other. A forbidden love born in a tense atmosphere… Secret meetings during the night… Exchanging secrets under a full moon…” he said, suggestively. “Does this ring a bell?”

“You mean…” Shuichi didn’t complete the sentence.

“I mean that you are going to work for me. You’ll be my spy. You are going to go back to the others and pretend to hate me, meanwhile, you are going to meet me during the night and tell me everything. Ah, and of course we are going to be lovely-dovely, what kind of Romeo and Juliet would it be otherwise?”

“But what’s the point of—“

Kokichi put a finger on his lips, silencing him.

“The point is, my beloved, that this is what I’m telling you to do.” he smirked. “Unless you have a better idea?”

Shuichi stared into his eyes, trying to read his mind.

“All right, what I have to do exactly?”

“I told you, for now, you are going to go back to the others and do whatever. If my life is in danger, find a way to save me, if you can, tell me all about their plans. I’m going to cause some more mischief and you are going to help me! It’s nothing too complicated, we just have to get the audience’s full attention.”

Kokichi backed away from him and pondered for a second. After staring at the Bugvacuum for a while he approached Shuichi again with a grin. He started to open the buttons of his black jacket.

“Okay, now what are you doing?!” his voice was high pitched.

“Never heard of make-up sex, Saihara-chan?” he smiled broadly.

“What?!” Shuichi was panicking.

“Basically it went like this: First, I brought you here to talk, and then I was able to convince you of my innocence. After that, we finally went all out in a hot night of passion and there is where the audience is going to enter into play. Understood?” Kokichi raised an eyebrow.

“So in other words…” his analytical mind was working even in this situation. Great. “The production cut this scene from the broadcast because we were having…” he blushed furiously. “Because this is not suited for TV. This will be your excuse for the absence of last night’s footage?”

“Bingo!” he went back to the buttons. “If the production is SMART,” he yelled at the ceiling, “They
will understand that this is the best way to recover from this mess. The audience will love it.”

“So… Why are you opening my jacket…?” he asked with a weak voice.

“Because, Saihara-chan!” he said like he was talking to an idiot. “We are going to lie in bed and fake our beautiful awakening from our first night together.” he threw the open jacket on the floor.

“B-but! I don’t want to get undress!” Shuichi took a couple of steps behind.

“Don’t worry. This is enough.” Kokichi discarded his scarf on the floor. “I don’t want you to be naked on TV either. I’m the one who is going to take a look at the merch first! Me and only me!”

Shuichi blushed even more. Kokichi tried to ignore this. He wanted to believe that he was being truthful here but… he couldn’t. It would hurt too much to trust him now, especially about something as delicate as feelings and love. This was all a lie anyway. A performance. A charade. If Shuichi was a bit infatuated with him, that only played to their advantage. But Kokichi was not going to count on it. Especially since he didn’t deserve any affection to begin with.

He picked up the Bugvacuum from the floor and hid it under the blanket, just in case, then he signaled Shuichi to lie down next to him. He hesitated just a moment then searched for a good position. Kokichi covered them both with the blanket and curled up right next to him, with his face almost touching Shuichi’s chest, who was still bright red. Kokichi sent him a smirk.

“Ready for the morning after the first night of marriage?”

“Can you stop saying these things? It’s really embarrassing, probably even more since it’s not even true.” he was refusing to meet his eyes.

“Oh, so it would be less embarrassing if it was true! Interesting, I’ll keep it in mind!” Kokichi chuckled.

“Please don’t. I have a feeling I’m going to regret having said this.” he was still not looking at him.

“Nishishi!” he got closer to Shuichi’s ear again. “I hope you are good at acting half what you think you are.” he whispered sweetly.

He searched for the Bugvacuum switch, breaking eye contact. When he found it and looked back at him, Shuichi was staring at his neck.

“What?” Kokichi asked, unsure, was there something on him?

“Ah, just… I never saw you without your scarf before…” Shuichi mumbled confusedly.

Kokichi suddenly felt really naked.

“Don’t stare at me with that face!” why was he making this more embarrassing that it was supposed to be? “No wait…” his brain reminded him what he was trying to do. “Actually, keep staring at me with that face, you look like an idiot in love. It’s perfect. Keep going Romeo-chan.”

“Can you stop ridicule my feelings, please? And don’t call me Romeo-chan.” he tried to sound angry, but he failed.

“Would you rather be called ‘honey’?” Kokichi tried to sound seductive.

“No.” he sighed theatrically. “And here I thought Saihara-chan was awkward. How naïve of me.”
Kokichi had the crazy impulse to kiss him. Gosh, he was just too adorable when he was acting like this.

“I’m turning off the Bugvacuum. Be ready.” said instead.

Kokichi pressed the switch. The room would not fill with cameras for a while probably, so they needed to wait like this for a bit. Kokichi started to lightly nuzzles Shuichi’s chest with his nose, setting up the mood, the other froze next to him, but just for a moment. Hesitantly, he extended a hand and stroked a strand of Kokichi’s hair with the fingertips. It was Kokichi’s turn to freeze. Well, maybe this could work after all… He seemed capable enough to act…

They remained under the blanket for more time than necessary. Kokichi pressed his face into his chest. Shuichi’s heartbeat was slightly faster than normal. Shuichi gained a bit more confidence and started to stroke his hair more, with his entire hand. Kokichi relaxed a bit into the warmth, he wouldn’t mind just staying like this for the whole day. Not at all. He could easily fool himself into thinking they were doing this just because they wanted and not for any other reason. But he was not going to. He had a show to run.

Reluctantly, he broke the contact with him and started to stretch theatrically, yawning with his mouth wide open.

“Good morning, my beloved Saihara-chan.” he almost purred into his neck, making Shuichi go bright red again. Lovely. “Have you slept well or are you still sore?” he smirked knowing that he was being mean.

“W-what—I mean… N-no I’m fine…?” Shuichi had no idea how to handle this, as expected.

Kokichi placed a peck on the tip of his nose, cheering internally at Shuichi’s expression.

“Aww! My beloved is being modest?” he smirked again. Shuichi was bringing out his sadistic side full force. “You weren’t so modest yesterday! I would have never expected you to be so… aggressive. I’m kinda surprised, honestly. I never thought you would be an S!” Kokichi had to use all his auto-control to not laugh his ass off at Shuichi’s scandalized expression. Him, a S. No way in hell. “But I guess I should have expected it, Shuichi Saihara, double S.” he purred again. Shuichi was on the verge of a mental breakdown, there was no way he could be any redder than he was right now. “Hmm? No rebuttal? I see now! You’re a wolf in the night and a puppy in daylight! Cute! Very cute, S-chan!”

Kokichi jumped to his feet before Shuichi could really have a heart attack. He searched around for something to eat that fit his purpose. He decided for a little chocolate bar with hazelnuts then he jumped back on the mattress, making Shuichi, who was sitting up, lose his balance and fall back down.

“Now, as every good couple should do, I’m going to feed you! Say ‘ahh!’” Kokichi was actually having the time of his life. Who was the real S there?

Shuichi in the meantime had recovered a bit. He took the chocolate bar from Kokichi’s hand taking him by surprise and then he snapped it in half. He gave him back one half.

“Half for you, and half for me?” he proposed.

Kokichi wanted to squeal like a little girl, but kept himself in check. Shuichi taking the initiative was kinda sexy.

They started to feed each other. It was a long and awkward procedure, but they endured it. Kokichi
had not initially envisioned himself being fed, but he supposed Shuichi deserved a prize for his bold move. And maybe he deserved a little punishment too for screwing around so much.

After they finished the bar, they got up and recovered the two clothing items Kokichi had discarded on the floor. Thinking fast, Kokichi found another excuse to keep the ball rolling. He stared at his clothes with a pout.

“What’s wrong?” Shuichi asked after a while, noticing him.

“Hmm… I don’t like to be in these clothes after I did stuff with you!” he frowned. “I wanna take a shower! I feel filthy!”

Shuichi blushed again, but this time he recovered almost immediately. He was learning fast. Impressive.

“Well… there is no shower in here… What am I supposed to do about that?”

“Ah, thank you for your offer, I’ll take on it!” he smiled putting his hand behind his head. “Sooo… You like me, right?” Kokichi was supposed to ask ‘you love me, right?’ but even in this situation, he could not bring himself to force him to lie about that.

“Y-yes…” Shuichi’s answer was both believable and not.

“Theeeen! Help me out! You friends will kill me if I were to show myself!” he faked some tears. “Distract them! Do something!”

Shuichi grimaced a little, but then nodded. Kokichi got closer to him, placing his hands on his chest.

“Thank you, Saihara-chan.” he was purring again. “Next time, maybe we can take a shower together, okay?”

Shuichi’s expression was priceless.

Chapter End Notes

Next time Somewhere:
Only a miracle could stop this madness.
Rantaro laid in bed with his eyes wide open.

There was just no way that he could hurt Kaede, what was Nagito thinking? The next day he would wake up earlier than usual and go to her apartment, he would apologize, explain and ask her to play along with him so Nagito would be satisfied. With that hopeful thought, he fell asleep.

It looked like he only managed to rest for a couple of minutes when the doorbell rang. Rantaro’s heart jumped in shock, he looked at his alarm, it was five-thirty in the morning. The doorbell rang again, sounding more urgent. Rantaro had a terrible feeling. His worst fear was confirmed when he opened the door.

“Good morning Rantaro! I thought I’d come a little earlier today!” Nagito entered like this was his own house. Rantaro honestly started to panic. “We’ll start our training right now so you’ll be all warmed up when your lovely friend come by!” he smiled amiably. “Have you already eaten?”

Rantaro was about to answer ‘No, I haven’t’ but he caught himself in time.

“Yes, I have already eaten…” his stomach begged to differ.

“Wonderful! I haven't, so I’ll talk with you over a nice breakfast if you don’t mind!” he casually walked into Rantaro’s kitchen and started preparing something for himself without permission.

They talked for a long time. Nagito asked him a variety of random questions, from food to habits to memories about his past. It was all pretty easy; he just needed to pull fake answers out of nowhere. They ate lunch together and Rantaro ate twice as much than usual, missing breakfast had been painful. After the meal, Rantaro was already tired, but Kaede had not appeared yet, he should’ve predicted it, she was always visiting him in the afternoon. When the doorbell rang, again he was not mentally prepared, even after hours of anticipation. Maybe, he should just drag her away… But that would still count as defeated on Nagito’s book. Maybe, if she saw Nagito inside the apartment she would sense that something was wrong.

He invited her inside but when they reached the living room, no one was there. Rantaro actually started to feel sick. The fucker had hidden himself to make sure Rantaro would be the only one responsible for what would happen next. He surely was spying on them from somewhere. Rantaro took a deep breath, he really was a coward. Any other man would have punched Nagito already. Kaede deserved much better than this. It was better to get it over with it as soon as possible.

“Are you okay? You look weird, can you tell me what’s going on?” Kaede was losing her patience a bit.

“There is nothing to explain.” he forced himself to face her. “Can I be honest? I’m starting to get annoyed by you, you constantly come to me and yap about this and that… I wish you’d solve your problems on your own. I wish you’d leave me alone, can’t you give me more space?”

Everything he said was the exact opposite of what he was thinking.

“W-what?!! But I thought…” Kaede was shocked.
“What? That just because my sister said something stupid I would follow suit? My sister is pretty
dumb and she doesn’t understand anything at all. Because of her, I was forced to spend even more
time with you. Why can’t everybody just leave me alone?”

Kaede slapped him without a warning.

“You can say what you want about me…” he had already tears in her eyes. “But don’t blame your
sister for it. If you are a coward and a liar and couldn’t tell me what you were really thinking about
me, you shouldn’t blame anyone but yourself.” she took a step back. “I had the wrong idea about
you. Goodbye.”

She left the apartment without looking back. Rantaro placed a hand on his warm cheek. He wanted
to scream, cry and follow her. Possibly not in that order. Nagito then appeared out of nowhere.

“Now, this is what I call a lie! I can give this a 9 out of 10. But…” he tilted his head. “Shouldn’t you
follow her? If you don’t solve this immediately it’s going to be pretty bad pretty soon.”

“YOU TOLD ME TO DO IT!” Rantaro was not calm.

“Ah! How did you like that lie?!?” Nagito smiled satisfied. “Did you really think I have the power to
keep you from entering the studio or anywhere else? See? This is how you lie.” he crossed his arms.

Rantaro wanted to punch him to Saturn, but he had a more pressing issue at hand. He ran out of his
apartment. He tried Kaede’s apartment but she didn’t answer the door. She could be just avoiding
him, but he was sure this was not the case. She was the type of girl to want to be in the open when
she was sad or angry, not locked inside a room. He left the complex. She could not be far, but she
could be anywhere. Even if she would rather be in the open, she surely wanted to be alone, so she
wouldn’t be in the crowded streets. He needed to find a quiet place nearby.

He found her by the lakeside. It was the closest quiet, open place. She was seated on the grass,
hugging her knees. He approached her slowly then stopped when he was standing behind her.

“You know, my little sister died drowning in a river much like this one.” he had no idea what to say
exactly, the river had made him remember this. Maybe he wanted to give her a piece of truth in
exchange for all these lies. “This is why I decided to enter Danganronpa.”

Kaede stared at him with wide eyes, not sure how to react.

“Everything that I said earlier was a lie. All of it. Flip it on the opposite side and you’ll get the truth.
But you know one thing?” he sat near her but not near enough to presume they were sitting side to
side. “I just realized, there is still so much we don’t know about each other and ourselves. At the
bottom of all lies, there is a spark of truth and at the bottom of all truths there is a spark of a lie. The
world is not composed of black and white. Maybe, before we start to talk about feelings, we should
know each other better? How can you trust me and understand when I’m lying if you don’t know
how I actually feel? I think we should take this opportunity and start from scratch. Let’s not built a
relationship on doubts and preconceptions, all right? I am the Ultimate Big Brother, but there is more
to me than just that, there is the person ‘Amami Rantaro’ not to mention ‘Fukawa Ryoji’. These are
all sides of me, whether I remember them or not. I’m not going to run away from anything anymore.
Kaede... Kyoko… Do you want to go on a date with me?”

Kaede was silent for a long time then she sighed and smiled.

“Most people tend to see only the bright side of me, the Ultimate Pianist, happy and optimistic. Yet
‘Akamatsu Kaede’ tried to kill a human being inside that world. I had no idea it was virtual reality, I
was honestly trying to kill someone. Not to mention ‘Naegi Kyoko’, I barely know anything about her. She scares me a bit. I can’t exactly blame you if you are not Prince Charming, now, can I?”

“Yeah, I’m sorry. I don’t think I’m fit for that role.” he smiled as well. “I’m a flawed human being. I’m a coward and indecisive about things that I’ve never confronted before. Not to mention, I tend to hide what I’m truly feeling sometimes to make myself more appropriate in the presence of little children. Sometimes I’m irritated and frustrated, but I won’t let it show.”

“Where are we going for our first date?” he smiled brightly.

Rantaro was improvising when he asked, so the entire evening ended up with him improvising on the spot. They strolled around without a defined destination, tried a lot of different food, explored the city and even more importantly, they talked a lot about themselves. Rantaro told her everything about his family, his life prior Danganronpa and all the interests that Ryōji, not the Ultimate Big Brother, had. He told her all about his football team and his collection of Shounen manga. Kaede told him about her family as well and all the things she wanted to try. In her memories she was enamored with the piano, she never did anything that could cause harm to her fingers. Of course, Kyoko had probably done a lot of these things, but now Kaede wanted to experience them again, as a normal teenage girl. The date was a success, all things considered.

Nagito, of course, was nowhere to be seen when he came back. He was so tired that he fell asleep immediately. The next day Nagito appeared again, they resumed his training without mentioning anything about the day before. This time, Rantaro poured his heart into it. It was time to confront Danganronpa for real. They kept the rule in place until they were seated in the white couches. After the show started, Nagito immediately took control of the situation, he tried to bait Rantaro into every sort of trap. First, he reminded him of the bet and told him he was going to lose. They then proceeded to comment on the day that was shown on the screen, barely leaving Shirogane any space to speak. Kokichi was speaking with the others in the dining room and then Kaito punched him.

“See, I told you he is planning a murder. He is being pretty transparent!”

“No, quite the opposite!” Rantaro was standing his ground. “Gonta is the one that’s acting weird; Kokichi drew attention to himself with that speech! This is definitely something Leader would do! He is trying to make Gonta change his mind!”

“I can’t see that at all. He could’ve talked to him had that been the case.” Nagito shrugged.

“Leader doesn’t completely trust anyone in there. The atmosphere is different from our old season! Scaring Gonta by actively going after him could lead to worst results!”

-Holy… epic battle is epic!-

-#TeamBigBro-

-Rantaro understands Kokichi better than Nagito, he must be right-

-Let’s not forget that he is the Survivor now, Kokichi is not Leader anymore!-

-Go Kokichi, slay them all and win!-

The training was continuing mercilessly. Nagito started to force him to lie about his family or feelings for other people. Kaede joined them from time to time, she was not fond of Nagito, but she had accepted his help. She tried to take part in the training as well. The night opened with Kokichi and Shuichi talking, that earned a shower of comments from the shippers that were afraid their ship was going to sink soon. Nagito and Rantaro then fought again when Kokichi dragged Gonta to Miu’s
Lab. Nagito said that she was the selected victim Kokichi had chosen, while Rantaro defended him saying that he was doing just what Nagito had said the other day. Kokichi was trying to talk Gonta out of his plans by showing him the Electrohammers and give him hope. Shirogane tried to interrupt them more aggressively that night.

-Hell, this is getting good finally! This is my Danganronpa!-

-I can’t wait to see what will happen, who will die?!

-I honestly don’t really care if Miu dies… She is too vulgar-

-Miu best waifu! Fight me!-

Rantaro observed the people fighting fiercely on the internet with a smile. Kokichi’s popularity was off the charts. There was no way he would not win the popularity pool the next day. They just needed to keep up the good work and he would receive his prize, as predicted. Rantaro strongly hoped that Kokichi had a very good idea because Danganronpa was as popular as ever.

Only a miracle could stop this madness.

Chapter End Notes

Next time on the Present Side:
So you have not escaped from me, I see. I’ve brought you something to eat! Hurry before it gets cold.
“Ah, before you go. I have a special mission for you.”

Kokichi could not leave his Lab for long or his life would be at risk. There was something he really wanted to do.

“What is it?” Shuichi’s interest was piqued. He wanted to know more about the real plan, not just the farce they were putting on display.

“I need you to explore the school once again. Drag the others along too, I want to take a shower in peace!” of course the shower was the least of his concerns.

“What am I searching for?” Shuichi could see the real objective.

“Remember the writing in the grass? Horse A? I wanna know if there is anything else around.” he was going to open Rantaro’s Lab and see if this thing was supposed to go there. His instinct was telling him that writing was important.

“Isn’t that your idea of a joke?” asked Shuichi with a sigh.

Oh right. Kokichi had written all over it, hadn’t he?

“Ah, so you have seen my beautiful message! Did you like it?” Shuichi rolled his eyes. “Buuut… Only the additions were my doing. ‘Horse A’ was not me.”

“Really?” Shuichi was now intrigued.

“Really, really! I hate lies and jokes!” he made a completely unbelievable serious face.

Shuichi fought a smile, then nodded.

“Okay, do you think it’s something important?”

“Probably.” Kokichi got closer to him again and purred into his ear. “Now, be a good boyfriend and make me happy, pretty please!”

Shuichi broke the contact with a sigh.

“Yeah, yeah, no need to be pushy.” he smiled again, this time it was a bit shy and a bit worried. “I’ll see you later… Right?”

Of course, after all the times Kokichi had lied and tricked him, it was obvious he would not completely trust him. Kokichi didn’t deserve trust at all, not even now. He was going to do stuff behind his back all over again. Shuichi checked his appearance on the mirror inside the small toilet and then made his way to the Lab door. He was about to open it when he stopped in his tracks. Kokichi was about to ask him what was wrong, when suddenly he came back to him with a determined expression. He got closer again and Kokichi for a second wondered if he wanted to punch him or something, but no, rapidly, before Kokichi could take a step back, Shuichi placed a little kiss on his right cheek. He left without looking back. Kokichi was not going to acknowledge the fact that he was burning up. Nope.
Kokichi sat on the chair in front of the monitors and waited for Shuichi to appear on the screen showing the entrance area. He opened the tile and went out in the open while looking around for potential witnesses.

Kokichi waited for him to appear in the dining room where all the others were already gathered. Momota-chan was safe and sound, Miss Girlfriend had ‘saved’ him. Well, more safe than sound actually, he looked bad, but at least he was alive and standing. The people in the room were talking about him and Shuichi. As predicted Momota-chan had been able to keep the morale up, they were not in despair. He had not been wrong in trying to take him as a hostage.

Momota-chan was declaring, adamantly, that Shuichi had been taken as hostage in place of him and they had to save him. That was when Shuichi entered the dining room, interrupting him. Silence spread. They were all staring at him like he was a ghost. Shuichi fidgeted a little under their stares.

“What’s wrong…?” he tried to ask.

“Bro! You are alive!!” Momota-chan had apparently forgiven him entirely as he launched himself on his ‘sidekick’ and hugged him tightly.

“Y-yeah, of course…” Shuichi patted him on the back awkwardly.

“No, wait. How come you’re here?” Miss Girlfriend was ruining the party as usual. “You were taken by Ouma, right?”

Kokichi hitched forward, he didn’t want to lose a single word. He wanted to see how good at lying the Detective really was.

“Ah, yeah… I thought I could reason with him… I wanted him to release Kaito so…” Shuichi was talking a bit too slow to be completely believable. “We agreed in an exchange of hostages. I thought I could talk him out of whatever he was doing, so I offered myself—“

Momota-chan hugged him again, ruffling his hair.

“Now this is my sidekick! You’ve been really courageous!”

“And it worked? You actually convinced the mastermind of the killing game to stop? How come you’re here now?” Miss Girlfriend was not backing down.

“Ah, no, not exactly. I just used a moment of distraction to escape, that’s all. He is not convinced.”

Well, this was not too shabby an act.

“Where was he keeping you imprisoned?” she was still going strong.

“In the hidden room in the library,”

Kokichi cheered internally. Smooth!

“For real?! What’s in there??” Momota-chan had fallen completely for the lie.

“Monitors, he keeps track of all our movements from there.” Shuichi was shooting one lie after another, no problem. Well, he was taking inspiration from reality, but there was nothing bad about that.

“I see…” even Miss Girlfriend looked convinced now. “How was he able to avoid your trap though?
The one that killed Rantaro?”

Kokichi could not see the direct link she was trying to make; it made very little sense for her to ask that. He could have simply avoided the library entirely. Why would he fall into the trap at all?

“There is a second entrance.” Shuichi said with confidence. “He made me enter from another entrance. Unfortunately, I was blindfolded; I don’t know where it is. That’s what I want to ask you all! Please, let’s explore the school again, I think we can find the secret entrance!”

Kokichi started to laugh like an idiot. Shuichi was not bad at all! Hell, that was a great lie! Not only did it cover for them perfectly, but it made him reach his objective as well! Very nice!

Kokichi grabbed the Bugvacuum and waited for them to leave the building. Shuichi was aware he needed to keep them away from the entrance so he dragged them all outside. Kokichi smiled gratefully, and hurried to the top floor. He activated the Bugvacuum right before he could see Rantaro’s Lab door. Placing the Bugvacuum on the floor he quickly lock-picked the door. The programmers could see him, but he was pretty sure no one would stop him. It was difficult to execute him for having violated the rules when there was no video proof to show the audience.

He picked up the Bugvacuum and hurried inside. The quantity of red in the room was nauseating. As if Rantaro was fit at all for this Lab. Kokichi rolled his eyes. There was a laptop on the table that immediately caught his attention. It was empty. Kokichi remembered Rantaro saying that they made him record a video. This was surely used to see it. But where was the video?

The answerer surely was in the big vault in the far back wall. He observed it closely, but he only needed a moment to understand. Horse A was a piece of the puzzle. He needed another piece. His instinct was never wrong, he was sure that writing was important! Hopefully, Shuichi would be able to find the other half somewhere. He had to trust him with this, he couldn’t explore the building himself.

In any event, this was not very important, truth to be told. What he wanted was not to see the video, but to make sure no one was going to see it. The producer wanted to use this to close the season. Kokichi was not going to let them do what they pleased. Kokichi left the room and locked it again. He briefly considered why they had left the lock like this. Since this was virtual reality, they could just add an invisible wall to block him from entering. Was this an oversight or it was intentional? Maybe they wanted him to find the video and use it. If that were the case, they would be very disappointed.

He turned off the Bugvacuum and returned to his Lab. Of course, without taking the shower, it was just a bluff, but the audience was going to believe he did based on the lack of footage. Surely, they were not going to show him stark naked on national TV. But then Kokichi remembered the Love Hotel. Were sex scenes allowed as long as they happened inside that place? That thought was quite disturbing. He hoped none of the others had used it. On the other hand, the Love Hotel looked a good place to go and have a little charade… He had another task to ask of Shuichi.

It was early afternoon when everyone returned to the dining room, they looked defeated. Shuichi’s steps, however, had a certain lightness. Kokichi, who had looked at him for quite some time, recognized it. Shuichi was in a good mood. They ate in silence, Shirogane left for the bathroom at some point. One by one, they left, except for Momota-chan, Miss Girlfriend and Shuichi. The three of them talked for a bit, Momota-chan asked for Shuichi forgiveness about his behavior, Shuichi forgave him easily, and the girl said nothing at all. Of course, she was only happy to have her Boyfriend back.

After they left, Shuichi went into the kitchen and after a while, he left the dining room with a plate in
his hands. Kokichi had a feeling he knew what was going on. He had confirmation when Shuichi appeared at the entrance and after placing the plate on the floor for a moment, opened the secret entrance, he picked up the plate and disappeared inside. The gentle soul that was Shuichi was bringing him a true lunch. He must have noticed that Kokichi was surviving on cookies. Kokichi was sure that his real body was being taken care of by machines, so not eating inside was not going to kill him, but the feeling of hunger was very real and very bothersome. Shuichi opened the door of his Lab and smiled when he saw him.

“So you didn’t run away from me, I see.” he had a very fond and content expression Kokichi could not bear to look at for long. Too beautiful and too generous for him. “I’ve brought you something to eat. Hurry before it gets cold.”

Kokichi, who was starting to feel a little cold himself, sat on the mattress and gestured him to sit next to him. Shuichi carefully placed the plate on the blanket and sat closer to him. Kokichi took the plate and tucked them both into the blanket. Shuichi was taken by surprise at first, but then he shifted a bit closer sensing that Kokichi wanted to warm up. They were now side-by-side; Kokichi placed the plate on his legs and started to eat. Shuichi just waited for him to finish in silence. He looked perfectly content with the atmosphere and honestly, Kokichi was too.

After he finished eating, he placed the plate on the floor and lunged forward to hug Shuichi, almost making him lose balance and fall on his back.

“Hm-hm-hm!” he hummed contently. “My Prince Charming has come down in the depths of Hell to rescue me!”

Shuichi sighed with affection and stroke his hair tenderly. Kokichi’s level of diabetes was rising far too quickly. He had to bring things back to reality and his plan, otherwise; he may actually start to fool himself that everything was actually real. It was a very dangerous thought.

“So, how was my beloved Super Sadist-chan’s day?”

Chapter End Notes

Next time Somewhere:
Let’s work hard to destroy Danganronpa, partner.
Some of the thoughts expressed in this chapter about the characters are not necessarily my own.
And of course, it's not meant to offend anyone. I just tried to find a fault in every character with various degrees of success.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

“He just asked Monokuma to place a motive inside the Virtual World, what other proof do you need?”

The battle was fierce once again. Nagito was not leaving him any room for arguments.

“We still don’t know anything about the outside world,” the production had not shown Kokichi opening the door, so everyone was still theorizing about the motive card key, “Maybe it’s something that will convince Miu to stop her plan.”

“She wants to kill him, but Kokichi is going to use Gonta as a shield and make him kill her, the placement of the photos were clear!”

Shirogane was boiling on her seat.

“Guys, guys, let’s not exaggerate with over thinking! It’s just some photos, you can’t base everything on-“

“Foolishness.” Nagito immediately interrupted. “Kokichi doesn’t do things without a clear intention behind them, stop underestimating him!”

Nagito and Shirogane started to argue strongly against each other, giving Rantaro a moment to collect his thoughts. The popularity pool was going to be announced right after the next commercial break, or so it was written on the program plan for the night when he peeked earlier. Everything would be decided in the next minutes, if Kokichi were to lose first place in this pool, he would not have enough time to win for a full week in a row after the trial. The murder was going to be consumed in the next hours inside the Neo World Program. Miu was getting impatient; she wanted to kill Kokichi in the virtual world the next day. Rantaro hoped that all their meddling had been enough to get him to live through another phase.

During the commercial break, a man in a black suit entered the filming area and addressed Shirogane.

“Shirogane-san, stop it! Let them discuss what they want. They are doing a great job! We haven’t had this many views since season 51, the audience is going crazy for them and Ouma. Stop interfering!”

“But…! They are spoiling all the plot points—“

“I don’t care as long as it creates a positive reaction with the audience!” the man’s tone was harsh.
“This is my season! I decide what is good and what not!” Shirogane was losing her composed aura.

“No, you surely don’t! Don’t ever forget that this show is sponsored by us! You can do what you do because of us, don’t forget that! You don’t own Danganronpa, you can’t do whatever you want!”

Rantaro was following the conversation with great interest. The man was probably one of the owners of the Danganronpa brand. The mastermind and host clearly had less power than they did. This was going great. Shirogane had a personal vendetta against Rantaro and Chiaki’s season, but the sponsors only cared about getting good results. As long as they were the ones in charge, he and Nagito could run the show by themselves, stealing the spotlight. Shirogane observed the man leaving with tightly closed fists. She was almost trembling with anger. She turned towards him and he didn’t have time to hide a smile. She sent him a murderous glare.

The popularity pool was exactly as Rantaro hoped. Kokichi was in first place, Shuichi second. Now they just had to score him another win and they were all set. The rest was in Kokichi’s hands.

The next day Rantaro found a piece of paper in under his door.

-I DON’T KNOW WHAT YOU ARE SCHEMING, BUT I WON’T LET YOU RUIN MY SEASON!!-

It was not signed, but Rantaro didn’t need much thinking to see who it was. So she was scared of him now? It sounded pretty fitting, a nice revenge for the person that had killed him without any remorse. After he had emerged from the Neo World program, she was feeling so sure of herself to look down on him and not think much of what had happened. For her, everything had been a game from the very beginning. Now the player she eliminated so easily was coming back to bite her in the ass in the real world. He was putting her most treasured dream in danger. Rantaro was proud of himself.

That day he took Kaede out on a date again. Rantaro had taken a lot of notes from the last time they had talked, he had wrote down everything she said she wanted to do. He brought her to a farm outside of town where they harvested a bunch of strawberries, raspberries and blackberries. Then they climbed an apple tree and took a basket of them too. Later they gathered some hay and fed more than a hundred goats. Another point on the list was gardening, so they bought some potted plants for their apartments. Rantaro, in particular, was a lover of cactus and she teased him about liking the ‘tsundere queen of all plants’. After they brought everything home, they started cooking the fruits. The next point on the list was baking and what better idea than making an apple pie and a berry cake? The result was far from perfect, but they had a lot of fun. The last point on the list for the day was a classic concert. Rantaro had researched and booked it right after their first date. This was something she had not mentioned. In her memories, she had probably heard a bunch of concerts, but Rantaro was curious if she had actually ever heard a live concert. He was proven right, she was extremely enthusiastic and said that hearing it live was completely different from her memories.

After the end of the concert, Rantaro asked her if she had tried to play the piano in the real world. She answered that she was a bit scared because she knew what she had to do, but she was pretty sure her fingers would not move in the right way in reality. Rantaro told her he wanted to be the first one to hear her play the piano for her real first time and Kaede blushed, pleased. They promised each other.

It was pretty late when Rantaro kissed her on the cheek in front of her door and wished her goodnight. Kazuichi, the usual peeper, was still wearing that smug expression when Rantaro started to walk away.

“Well, my girlfriend is really cute, can you blame me?” Rantaro told him, he was done running from
the truth.

Kazuichi sent him a big smile and a thumbs up.

“Oh, finally you are admitting it! I was starting to wonder if you wanted to keep me out of the loop or something!”

Rantaro sighed with a fond smile. He knew that Kazuichi was just looking out for him in his own nosy way. How could you hate a guy like this?

Nagito came right after lunch the next day and another lesson started, this time the guy looked really serious.

“Tell me, how do you feel about Shirogane?”

“She is a very caring girl, not ambitious at all and I like her a lot.” This was easy, Nagito was just warming up.

“What about Teruteru and Peko?”

“Teruteru needs to get a grip on reality, his actions won’t be forgivable forever, and he can’t play the sympathy card every time. Peko has to stop being so fixed on Fuyuhiko and live for herself, her obsession is a bit too strong, and she has to grow out of the character that was given to her.”

“Ibuki, Mahiru, Hiyoko and Nekomaru?”

“Ibuki has constantly her head in a cloud, being optimistic and easy going is all well and good but never placing a foot on the ground will make her blow away. Mahiru should stop bossing everyone around, especially when she is the first to not have a clear vision of what she wants from herself.”

The comments started leaving his mouth more easily. “Hiyoko should decide if she wants to be liked or not, expecting to be treated well, while treating others poorly is very hypocritical. Nekomaru has a problem putting himself in someone else’s shoes, he has good sensibility, but tends to dismiss it in favor of a more rough approach that puts off some people and threaten his credibility.”

“Other thoughts?”

“Gundham is great and all, but sometimes I wish he would be easier to talk to, I never think of him first when I want advice or a favor. Kazuichi really needs to stop being so blind and actually look at himself; he will never be able to grow if he doesn’t face his faults!” Rantaro’s tone was taking on even more confidence. “Sonia is a strong girl and very dependable, being a Lady is a dream of hers but truthfully, she is much better when she stops trying so hard. Fuyuhiko’s heart is in the right place, so he should really make an effort with anger control, his mind would benefit from it. Byakuya should really stop acting like he’s a big shot all the time, he would be so much more likable that way! Tenko’s naivety is particularly annoying, sometimes I wonder if it can even be possible to be so gullible, she really should grow out of her character since her determination is very praiseworthy. Don’t make me start on Angie, Korekiyo and Miu. Kirumi is quite scary, her mask is well built and her will is overwhelming! Ryoma is so self-centered, in the game, he was always about himself and as soon as he left, he disappeared somewhere and didn’t care about the others. Gonta can be frustrating sometimes. Himiko is cute but completely useless, she doesn’t put enough effort into anything and always waiting for the others to help her. Kaito is cool, but completely detached from reality on many occasion, to charge head-on in every situation is not a good solution. Maki is like a trained puppy, she gets the imprinting effect and there is no turning back, not to mention that she is extremely selfish. Chiaki is sweet but her unwillingness to impose her belief on others is what created the whole mess with Shirogane in the first place, sometimes I wish she would take more
responsibility. And you,” he pointed at Nagito almost out of breath after having talked so much, “you are… a very cool guy and I like to hang out with you…?”

As Nagito started to laugh, Rantaro replayed the whole rant he just let out in his mind. Was what he said a lie? Except for Shirogane and Nagito, he was felt more like he had let out his real feelings. But that couldn’t be right… He was not really thinking all these bad things about his friends, was he?

“Congratulations! I see that you’ve finally grown up Amami Rantaro! Finally, you are not the ‘Ultimate Big Brother’ anymore, but a full-fledged human being! It was almost time!” he stood closer to him and placed a hand on his shoulder. “Now you can finally be of help! Ah, by the way… likewise! You are a cool guy and I like to hang out with you! And this is not a lie. Let’s work hard to destroy Danganronpa, partner.”

With that, he left. Rantaro let himself fall on his sofa, feeling drained. Finally, he understood. This was never about lies. Nagito was not trying to teach him how to lie well, or at least not only. He wanted him to abandon all the feelings and thoughts the Neo World Program and Danganronpa had implanted in him. To stop being the Big Brother that was covering for all his brothers’ and sisters’ faults. To become a person who was capable of expressing his true feelings without having to worry about his role and responsibility. He wanted him to realize that he could still care for everyone without having to keep his own personal thoughts and feelings at bay.

Nagito had successfully killed the fictional ‘Ultimate Big Brother’ to bring back to life, both Amami Rantaro and Fukawa Ryoji. A person, not a role.

“Fucking bastard.” Rantaro laughed, for the first time really grateful to Nagito.

Feeling finally free.

He was Danganronpa’s propriety no more.

Chapter End Notes

Next time on Present Side:

I’d rather die believing in the people I want to believe.

I'm not sure I have executed this chapter correctly but my intention was to make Rantaro ‘lie’ but in actuality he was telling the truth, because to say something bad about everyone he had to actually think about their flaws. So, he thought he was thinking up lies but in actuality he was pointing out flaws he noticed himself. And it became easier as he was going, because once you start a line of thought is easy to just keep going as long as you have fuel.

Now, whatever I pointed out actual flaws or not it's debatable, I found this task very hard... I had to think for example if I should use only the game canon or the Free Time Events as well. Since Rantaro didn't spend much time with everyone and we are talking about fabricated memories I decided to just use the game canon. Still, I think some of the things I wrote don't make complete sense or are too harsh.

Oh, well, I tried my best xD
“Super Sadist…” Shuichi sighed. “Have you came up with these nicknames for all of us or something?”

“Suuure! Wanna hear them?” Kokichi jumped at the opportunity to be a clown.

“No.” Shuichi was no fun.

“All right, so, there is Harukawa Maki… H. M.” Kokichi actually had to improvise. He had not thought of nicknames for them, it was too stupid. A waste of time and mental labor. But flexible thinking was his strong suit. “Honestly Masochist. I mean, to be Momota-chan’s girlfriend there is no other explanation!”

Shuichi covered his mouth with a hand and looked away. Kokichi knew he was hiding a smile.

“Himiko Yumeno… Hidden Yandere!”

“That doesn’t even make any sense.” Shuichi was fighting to keep the smile from showing.

“Non non, it does! At some point she totally went Yandere on Yonaga-chan!” Kokichi nodded, faking seriousness. “And now she is trying to leech off you!”

“She is not, stop exaggerating!” now he was smiling openly. “What about Kaito?”

Oh? Was he taking a liking to this?

“Momota Kaito… Ah, too easy! Moron King!” Kokichi said triumphantly.

“Why did I ask…” Shuichi sighed, still smiling.

“I have a talent I know! I always bring the best in people to light! Well, then. Will you tell me your day?” he added on a more serious note.

“Wait, what about Shirogane-san?” he asked truly surprised.

“Hm? What about Total Shit?” he tilted his head faking confusion. “What about the mastermind?”

“The… what?” every trace of amusement disappeared from his face.

“Oh, did I forgot to mention it? I discovered her real identity aaaaages ago! What? Were you still underestimating me, my beloved S-chan?” he placed a finger on Shuichi’s lips, his tone seductive.

The stared into each other eyes in silence, until Kokichi smiled and stepped away from him.

“Oh, but that’s a lie! I have no idea! None whatsoever!” he let himself fall on the mattress with his hands behind his head.

The programmers could decide to believe what they wanted, he was sure that at this point it didn’t really matter. They were either going to keep him on the show because he was making the audience
happy or they were going to kill him because he could not succeed. In any case, as long as he stayed out of the bigger picture, they would not be scared of him. And that was what he was going to do. Kokichi was going to stay out of the way; he was the main character no more. It was Shuichi who was going to do all the work. It was Shuichi that had to risk it.

After a moment of hesitation, Shuichi laid down next to him on his side, facing him.

“I explored the school as you asked,” Shuichi brought the discussion back on tracks, “and I think I found what you wanted me to.”

Kokichi’s interest perked up, he had chosen a good ally.

“What did you find?” he asked noticing that Shuichi was looking at the Bugvacuum.

He was afraid to reveal this information with the audience watching. Kokichi shook his head imperceptibly. There was no need to fear them on this.

“There was another piece of writing, it was on the wall of the boiler room.” he accepted his decision without questioning it, he was a good partner, even if he was still trusting as ever. “It was ‘Twins B’.”

Kokichi had no doubt; it was the second part of the combination for the vault in Rantaro’s Lab. He jumped to his feet, scaring Shuichi a bit and smiled widely.

“We are going, my beloved! To adventures!” he yelled with his arms spread open.

Shuichi was confused, but got to his feet as well. After checking everyone’s position thanks to Kokichi’s monitors, the two of them went up to the top floor. Activating the Bugvacuum, Kokichi opened the door again and Shuichi stared at the room with his mouth open. Kokichi didn’t wait for him, he opened the vault in a hurry, took the USB stick and grabbed the laptop on the table as well. He had to explain his plan to him, but now was not the right moment. The programmers were surely spying on them.

Kokichi hid the laptop inside his white jacket, even if it was a bit uncomfortable and put the stick in his pants pocket. He closed the door again and deactivate the Bugvacuum. After that, he held hands with Shuichi, intertwining their fingers together and dragged him back to his Lab humming a happy tune. He had not prepared an excuse for the lack of footage this time, but the production would surely think of something. Back in his Lab, Kokichi faked a yawn and dragged him on the mattress again. He hid the laptop under the mattress as discretely as possible.

“S-chan! You kept me awake the whole night, so now I’m tired! Hug me to sleep!” he said in his little kid imitation.

Shuichi, even if he was quite confused, just followed his suggestion and they hugged again, still a bit awkwardly. Kokichi had used the same excuse as last time to get a little bit of coverage. He needed to explain to him the whole Survivor’s Perk thing without being caught by the audience and the programmers. So writing on him was the only option once again. He explained everything again and told him that he was going to keep the laptop while Shuichi had to keep the USB stick. The others could not get both items, it would be a huge problem, and it would end the season right there.

Shuichi asked him, still writing, why he wanted the season to go on for long and Kokichi pondered his answer for a little bit. Should he reveal his whole plan? Now it was surely a good moment, hidden under the blanket, writing with their eyes closed… The only problem was, was Kokichi capable of trusting him with the whole plan? Even after they decided to work together, or rather,
Kokichi had roped Shuichi into helping; Kokichi still held all of the cards in his hands. He trusted him with his life, but not with every secret or thought he had. Kokichi was just as distrusting as ever, that hadn’t changed. One may think that his life was more important that his secrets or plan, but that was not it. For Kokichi dying was easy, even more now that he knew that this was Virtual Reality. Trusting someone with his thoughts and feelings was another matter entirely.

This plan involved him greatly so he deserved to know. Even more since Kokichi had initially decided to leave everything in his hands, but then changed his mind and forced him into his own plan without telling him anything. As always, Kokichi needed to tear apart the walls he had to build around him and tell him everything. It was only fair. And if he wanted to abandon him, he still had time now.

He started slowly writing, to make sure he was understanding every single word. The plan was pretty absurd, even more than the one he tried with Gonta and the Exisals. That time he just tried to stop the show from going on, this time he was going to actually break the game. Not like Nagito did, by using the rules of the game. He was going to break the whole system and make it impossible for the programmers to recover the situation. For that, he needed Shuichi; he needed his cooperation. He was the one that had to move around the building and do the manual labor. Kokichi could only help him with his acting skill and planning, he had to keep the attention away, but the rest was entirely up to him.

The first step was to divert the attention away from the killing game. As Kokichi always thought, love stories were the most powerful tool in this game. As long as he could keep the audience distracted with this little act, Shuichi could do the rest. Right now, he just needed to stall for time. He had to gain as much time as he could, so Shuichi could act a little at a time. Rushing to do everything would only get them killed.

He had originally planned to tell him only one-step at a time, so he wouldn’t be able to see the bigger picture. Because he was sure that Shuichi would hate the bigger picture in the grand scheme of things. It was honestly bad; Kokichi would not hold a grudge against him if he decided to turn his back to him. He wrote that as well, at the end of the exposition.

They remained in that position in silence for a long time. Kokichi was actually starting to get sleepy. He knew that this moment was very delicate and he needed to be awake for any questions the boy could have for him, but his eyelids were doing what they wanted. He fought against his own body for a while. He was feeling a bit colder than normal, so he reflexively scooted closer to Shuichi, too sleepy to notice what he was doing. After a moment, he felt Shuichi’s arms tighten around him, pressing him completely against his chest. Kokichi hid his face in his neck.

“Kokichi?” Shuichi’s voice was too soft, it was almost a lullaby. “You look very tired lately, are you sure you are not sick?”

“Uhm-hmm.” was the only thing Kokichi was able to say.

“Are you eating enough?” he tried to feel his forehead.

“Uhm-hmm.” he repeated, trying to convince him to stay still.

“You are cold, why you are always so cold?” he sounded worried, even to Kokichi’s half-sleeping brain.

“’unno…” answered in a slightly annoyed voice.

Could he not just stay still and silent? He wanted to sleep.
Shuichi sighed softly and hugged him tightly again.

“Sleep, you clearly need it.”

That awoke a small part of Kokichi’s brain.

“Things to do…” he said, even if he still did not intend to move from that position.

“Later. I’ll be here when you wake up. We can talk then.” he patted him gently.

“Hmm, help me…” asked the last part of his brain that was still awake. Probably it was the honest and needy part.

“Yes, I’ll help you. Even if you honestly scare me a little. This plan is pretty over the top. I’m still not completely convinced of… where all this takes place. So I’m a bit scared. But…”

Kokichi waited for him to finish with his eyes closed, very close to sleep.

“Call me crazy if you want, you have every right to, but I think I honestly trust you. Your brain is pretty rare, for you to get this far all alone… I’ll put my life in your hands, even if it’s scary. And if I’m wrong… Well, as Kaito is usual saying, ‘I’d rather die believing in the people I want to believe’. I decided to in believe you. Unfortunately, I’m not going to stop thinking that Kaito has a point there. You can spit on me later, I know you hate this kind of mushy feel-good stuff.”

Kokichi fell asleep with a smile on his lips.

Chapter End Notes

Next time Somewhere:
He really did it…
Kokichi’s, Nagito’s and Rantaro’s machinations were not for nothing. Everyone’s eyes were now focused on Kokichi and the events that would unfold from there. The excitement was running deep, every site was flourishing with activity. Rantaro had decided not to look into the previous seasons’ peak of popularity, so he was not qualified to say that this was the best season ever, but surely, it was popular. If this was Kokichi’s intention, it was working smoothly. Rantaro was incredibly grateful for Ryota’s help, thanks to him, he and his friends were the first ones to view the events before it was aired. Well, excluding the other programmers, storywriters and the whole production team in general. While they were approached Ryota’s office, Rantaro was surprised to see the people inside were greeting him and were happy to see him there. He asked Chiaki what was going on and she explained that there had been a slight change in the orders from the higher-ups. Since Nagito and Rantaro were actively helping the brand, they were now welcomed inside the headquarters. They even had permission to see any spoiler they wanted. Chiaki told him that something like this never happened before. For the better or the worse, they were changing something within the brand.

Ryota was looking even worse than usual. His bags were darker and his complexion was paler. He greeted them with a tired voice and went back to his seat immediately, as if standing was too much effort.

“Are you resting enough?” Rantaro asked him after the door was closed.

“I need to do a good job here or we may miss something vital.” he barely looked at him.

“I understand, but your health is important as well, don’t push yourself too hard.” he smiled gently.

“I’ll rest when the season is over, when Danganronpa is over.” he answered stubbornly.

Rantaro had to give up, Ryota may look very young, but he was actually older than the rest of them. He had to be at least 25 years old. He was an adult, Rantaro could not interfere with his life choices, and so, he could only give him advice.

“Do you have a lot of work to do?” he tried to change the subject.

“The decision to place a virtual world within a virtual world was pretty dumb, it didn’t even come from Hajime. Besides being dumb is pretty difficult to maintain as well. To work on two layers of virtual worlds at the same time is a major pain. It’s good that everyone went inside, following Ouma-san, otherwise this would have been a delirium.” he shook his head. “And luckily, they kept the setting as minimalistic as possible or we would have exploded from overwork.”

“They’re all inside?” Rantaro caught the most important detail.

“Oh, yeah, right.” Ryota switched back into work mode. “Ouma-san used Monokuma to bait them all inside. They have all connected themselves and now they are exploring the world. Iruma-san divided them into two groups. One at the mansion and one at the chapel. Ouma-san and Gokuhara-san are together at the mansion, Shirogane and Saihara-san are there as well. Shirogane took position
inside the dining room with the precise intent of giving Saihara-san an alibi. She doesn’t care a lot about who dies right now, but she needs the Detective to live, it’s paramount for the game to continue. She is ensuring that he will not die and or be suspected. Momota-san was on the mansion rooftop, but Iruma-san is disconnecting him from the world right at this moment.” he sighed deeply. “She wants to pin the blame for her crime on him. Before entering, she placed a bottle of poison on Ouma-san’s seat.”

“Wait, slow down! Are you saying that Miu intend to kill Leader and pin the blame on Kaito? How?” he asked, this was important to the show later.

“Well, this is mostly my own deduction, but… Iruma-san asked Ouma-san to meet her on the rooftop, then she appointed Momota-san there… I can’t see any other explanation.” he started maneuvering the cameras, showing the virtual world. It was a little map full of snow with a river in the middle. “She placed the poison as a diversion, to make it look like Momota-san killed Ouma-san in the outer layer of the Neo World Program, but actually she is going to kill him from this inner layer.” Ryota started talking with more professional terms and Rantaro was having trouble following. “She had kept a lot of things a secret. Like the fact that she can log out who she wants and she that she can go beyond the wall she set and—“

“I’m sorry, but you are really going too fast… I’m losing you…” Rantaro tried to stop him.

The look on the others’ faces was telling him that they weren’t following this explanation either. Ryota realized his mistake and started all over again. It took them quite a bit of time to fully grasp the situation and in the meantime, they saw Kaito leave the room and descend the stairs. He wanted to sleep in his room; the programmers had sent him a wave of nausea to keep him from wandering about too much. Following two layers of virtual reality was too much, even for the all mighty Danganronpa staff.

Ryota then showed them a collection of Kokichi’s moments. First, he spoke with Shuichi; the boy Detective was pretty stubborn. Then, he talked with Gonta while carrying some chairs. Kokichi’s expression when Gonta said he trusted him to solve the situation with his brain was painful. Rantaro realized only then, how much Kokichi must have been suffering. Kokichi remembered the previous season; he surely remembered being their Leader too. Now he was going against all he fought for during the previous year and he was going to cause Gonta’s death. The big guy had spoken to Leader, not to Kokichi. As he said, he could see the desire to help everyone in his eyes. Leader was still Leader, but now he was forced to betray everything and go against himself. Gonta’s speech must have reminded him all that.

It was late into the night when the murder occurred. Kokichi had subtly used his talent to manipulate Gonta’s actions. First, he broke him with the ‘despair of the outside world’, or more precisely, the setting of this season. Then he confronted Miu on the rooftop while completely defenseless, making Gonta’s protectiveness surface. As the scene unfolded, all the people inside the room fell silent, sadness taking over their faces.

“He really did it…” Mahiru commented after a while.

“Are we going to blame him?” that came out a little more forceful than Rantaro intended.

“No, no, of course not, it’s just…” Mahiru tried to defend herself.

“It’s difficult to conciliate this version of Leader with the old one, I get it.” said Fuyuhiko calmly.

“But look at him; he is shocked as much as we are.”

It was true; he was staring at Miu’s avatar body. His chibi face was not really expressive, so they
could not tell what he was feeling, but there was no real need. Especially after he asked Gonta why he had chosen this solution. Rantaro’s heart tighten when he understood what he meant by that. Kokichi planted the toilet paper and created the situation, but... he gave Gonta a choice. He could have let him to die or he could have knocked her down without killing her. Kokichi manipulated him, but Gonta had made the decision himself. Leader was ready to die if the big guy had decided for this solution. Rantaro felt tears sting in his eyes but he could not cry. It was not he that was pained, it was Leader, Rantaro had no right to be sadder than him.

So, now Miu was awake. He had to speak with her as soon as possible. It was really urgent to get her on the same page as everyone else, she needed to understand what Kokichi was doing more than anyone. Well, no, maybe Gonta needed it more, but he was not available yet. Rantaro almost didn’t want to see the trial, he had a feeling that tears were going to flow.

It was already three in the morning when they left Ryota alone to his job. Rantaro sighed looking at his back. The guy was going to overwork himself to death. Maybe he could talk with Hinata-san about this. They were friends, so he could probably stop him. Maybe. Probably not. After placing a peck on Kaede’s cheek, bidding her good night, he walked back to his apartment and went to sleep. The next morning Rantaro could not remember the dream he had, but he was sure it had been dreadful.

At the hospital, he was greeted by Miu’s screams which were passing through the walls.

“FUCK YOU! THEY KILLED ME! WHO KILLED ME?!”

Rantaro opened the door slowly, preparing his eardrums to go through hell. The girl was widely swinging her arms all around, while nurses were trying to calm her down and pin her to the bed. She was not exactly fighting back, but her words were like slaps to the face. She was shouting vulgarities Rantaro had never heard in his whole life. Suddenly the girl saw him peeking through the door and froze. The nurses were momentarily caught off guard and stared at him as well. Miu took advantage of that to squeeze out their grasp, grab her pillow and throw it at him. Rantaro retreated out of the room in a hurry as the girl fell on the floor, her legs not supporting her.

“YOU MOTHERFUCKER, YOU’RE HERE! FUCK YOU ALL! FUCK EVERYTHING, I HATE YOU ALL!!”

Rantaro scratched his head discouraged. Maybe he should have brought Kaede as well... Or maybe not, the two didn’t seem to get along so well in the Neo World Program. He listened to the swearing a little longer, and then a feeling of annoyance rose in his chest. She was clearly under severe shock and anger but this was going nowhere. He reentered the room, this time with full confidence.

“I killed you. I plotted your murder and killed you.”

“AHHHH?! What did you say, you dickcheese? It was you?! Com’ here I’m going to kill you myself!”

She was so deep in distress that she didn’t even notice the fact that what he said made no sense. He didn’t move from there anyway, there was no way he was going within range of her clawed hands.

“I did everything, I told Kokichi how to kill you. That’s why your plan failed, because I was helping him from here!” Nagito’s training was useful.

“Of course! There is just no way my plan would have failed otherwise!! So this is how it is! I get it now!!” she finally stopped fighting, the nurses tied her arm to the bed and gave her an IV.
As Miu was basking herself in the afterglow of her own praises, the nurses left sending him a confused glance. They told him not to make her angry again because there was a limit to how much calming drugs they could give her. Rantaro sat on the visitor’s chair, sure that the girl would not attack him anymore. This action had been mostly instinct, but Rantaro had had a feeling that what she was really complaining about was her plan failing, not her death. Since she was alive, her ego was now more important than her own murder. By telling her that she failed because someone from the outside world had interfered, he had stroked her ego and pacify her.

“So? Why did you kill me?” she was much calmer now.

“Because you were too smart. I really need Kokichi to survive for longer, I’m sorry, you were such a threat I had to eliminate you.” he was going to explain everything to her, properly, but first he needed to get her on his side as soon as possible.

“Ah-ah! I get it now! I see!” she nodded happily. “Is the little pussy your boyfriend? Who are you to have these privileges?”

“I’m the Ultimate Survivor and my area of influence is pretty great. By the way, no. My girlfriend is Kaede, sorry to disappoint you.” he was almost there, he could feel it. He would have never thought Nagito’s lessons would be so beneficial.

“Ohh! I see how it is! Are you interested in a harem perhaps? I can share, I’m not greedy. Let me in on all the juicy details!” she said in an attempt to be seductive.

Rantaro ignored the harem part and played hard to get for a little longer. The girl was almost begging him to reveal more in the end. Rantaro finally was able to tell her all the details. She was especially impressed by Ryota’s existence. Rantaro promised to take her to his office. In his heart, he prayed she would not try anything funny with him.

With Miu, you never know.

Chapter End Notes

Next time on Present Side:
The Love Hotel is such a nice place! You’ll love it!
When Kokichi woke up, he stretched his arms, feeling quite achy.

The warmth was really nice, so he kept his eyes closed for a little while longer, enjoying it. A movement next to him made him freeze, was there someone next to him? He opened his eyes and saw Shuichi looking at him with an unreadable expression. Kokichi sat up in a hurry.

“Crap, I fell asleep.” he looked around, trying to understand what time it was. “How much time did I waste?”

“Not much, it’s only dinnertime.” Shuichi sat up as well. “And you didn’t waste time. You were resting, as you should’ve.”

Kokichi dismissed that, this was no time to be resting.

“You need to go back. The others will get suspicious of you if you disappear so often for so long.”

“Yeah, I’ll go, but first…” he looked at his laps for a moment, like he was collecting his thoughts. “I thought a lot about your plan while you were sleeping. You’re asking for a lot.”

Kokichi could only vaguely remember what they talked about earlier as he was falling asleep. He only remembered something about Shuichi agreeing to help. He grimaced; he really didn’t want to have this conversation.

“If you want to ditch me, do it. It’s fine. I asked for a lot without giving anything in exchange. It’s normal that you don’t trust me.”

“No, I trust you. It’s crazy and maybe I shouldn’t, but I trust you. I’m just…” he sighed. “Scared. It’s so… wrong. It’s not that I don’t believe you, but what if you are mistaken? I’m not saying that you are lying!” he hurriedly added, like assuming this of him was a bad thing. Shuichi was truly a fool. “I mean that maybe you are remembering it wrong or you misunderstood something or someone lied to you…” he was frantically trying to sound reasonable. “You don’t have any proof, do you?”

“No, I don’t.” Kokichi tried his best to keep the irritation out of his voice. Shuichi was right, but also wrong at the same time. There was too much proof of the truth already; it was stupid to refuse to accept it at that point. Well, unless Kokichi’s mind was so messed up that he could not recognize anything anymore and he was just hallucinating the whole thing. No, better not venture to those thoughts. “I guess you could look at Rantaro’s perk, but that would not contain much in terms of proof.”

Shuichi was wearing an unreadable expression again, but he nodded. Kokichi shrugged and pulled the laptop from where he had hidden it and plugged in the UBS stick. Inside was a video, Rantaro was seated on a chair and talking directly to the camera.

“Hey, guess I don’t have to introduce myself! Yes, this is you, there is no trick, no actors, it’s you.”

Shuichi was staring at the screen attentively.

“So… you were given this ‘Survivor Perk’ as a prize for having survived the last season, yeah, that’s
Shuichi inhaled sharply.

“They are going to wipe my memory, in your case I guess they already wiped it, so you won’t remember a thing about all this… This is just how this game goes.”

Rantaro on screen sighed. Kokichi’s heart hurt, he recognized him, not as the person that was in the second killing game, but as his friend. As the Ultimate Big Brother, Love-me-chan. Kokichi smiled sadly, it was quite some time since the last time he used that stupid nickname.

“Anyway, your objective is to discover the mastermind’s identity and gain an advantage. I don’t know how you can fulfill our true objective, since I’m not even allowed to say it…”

Rantaro looked at something beyond the camera. Kokichi frowned, was he looking at that Admin guy?

“There is someone you need to help in there, while you won’t be able to recognize him… You see, there is a rule in this killing game that’s very important. Only three people can reach the end of this killing game, now the important part of that rule is—“

Rantaro was interrupted by a cough. So he tried to hint at Kokichi’s existence and the Survivors role, but he was not allowed to. Not surprising.

“I know you are smart, I think you can figure out the rest. Remember, you need to stay alive as long as possible, you never know when you may be useful. Good luck there.”

The video ended. Unfortunately, Rantaro never got to see this video, so he never got to hear about Kokichi or his necessity to stay alive. That would not have helped him anyway. Probably. Shirogane wanted him dead; there was no way for an amnesiac Rantaro to escape a trap forever. Kokichi could have ended in the same way if they had not decided to keep him alive. In a way, he should be grateful that he was allowed to reach this point at all.

Shuichi was staring at him funny.

“What? Yeah, this is not proof, but I think Rantaro let a lot of details slip, so you can get a clear answer from this.”

“No, it’s not that…” Shuichi looked away, like he was uncomfortable.

Kokichi was confused.

“What then?”

“No, it’s just… The way you looked at him. Like he was your best friend in life or something, and you even call him by his first name, without the –chan you always add…” he was still looking away. “You really like him, don’t you?”

Kokichi was stunned. At such an important moment, what was he thinking?

“Oh, are you jealous?” he dropped casually.

Shuichi got bright red and started to deny frantically.

“W-what? No! Of course not!”
“OH-MY-GOD-YOU-ARE-JEALOUS!” Kokichi slapped his own cheeks making a silly face.

“No, I told you that’s not it!” Shuichi’s voice was a higher pitch than usual.

“Don’t worry! I already confessed and he already rejected me, you are safe, my Beloved-chan! You still got to take my other firsts!” he said playfully.

Shuichi didn’t react. He was staring at nothing, faking disinterest while he was actually really tense. No way… Was he actually bothered by it? Ridiculous.

“He shattered my little virgin heart, but I got over it! Now I don’t feel hurt anymore.” he was not really capable of saying that with a straight face. Really, who was the real S in this relationship?

“Whatsoever.” Shuichi answered curtly, trying to drop the subject.

Kokichi licked his lower lip and caught it between his teeth feeling like a predator and a very silly person at the same time.

“Aww, has someone told you already that you are the most adorable boy in the universe?” he hitched closer to his face.

“Shut up!!” Shuichi hid his face in his hands, but that couldn’t really hide his furious blush.

“Nishishi!” Kokichi moved away, deciding to cut him some slack.

He had many happy feelings in his chest and that wasn’t good. It was too dangerous to get used to this.

“Anyway… As I said…” Shuichi was trying hard to go back to normal. “I’ll help you. Your plan is crazy and I’m really afraid I’ll fail, but I’ll try my best.”

“You can always back away.” Kokichi said nonchalantly.

“Why are you trying so hard to make me change my mind? I don’t get it.” Shuichi frowned.

“Simply because if I were you, I would never do it. That’s all.” Kokichi shrugged.

A long silence filled the room. Kokichi waited patiently. Shuichi had the right to choose his destiny.

“Are you scared?” the question took him by surprise.

“What? Of what?”

“Of me.”

Kokichi stared at him, completely devoid of words. Both knew that he was not asking in the most obvious sense. He was not asking if he was afraid of him hitting him or something like that, no. He was asking something deeper than that. Kokichi pondered his answer for a moment. He could lie but…

“Yes, I am.”

“I thought so.” Shuichi answered with a smile. “You keep asking me to go away, in a roundabout way. This doesn’t have anything to with your plan or whether you are believable or not. You are simply scared of working with me. Of trusting me.”
They both were silent for a while. Kokichi was looking away while Shuichi was staring at him. When did their roles change? How could he put so much pressure on him with so little effort?

“I’ll work hard. I’ll prove to you that you didn’t make the wrong choice.” Shuichi got up.

Silly Shuichi, Kokichi was already aware he had made the right choice. Shuichi didn’t have to prove anything. He was already perfect, and even if he failed, Kokichi would never be disappointed by him. This fear was something rooted deep inside him; it was at the very foundation of Kokichi’s being. Even before the Neo World Program, he could feel it. It was what Kokichi was made of. Fear of others. It was not Shuichi that needed to work hard. It was Kokichi. It had always been Kokichi. It was Kokichi that was in the wrong. All the time.

How could someone’s extended hand be so scary?

“All right Romeo-chan! You can be my best assistant!” Kokichi made a victory sign with a big smile.

“Great, but don’t call me that. Is there something specific you need me to do now?”

“Yeah! Fetch me two Love Keys!” Kokichi answered in high spirit.

“What…?” Shuichi was not expecting that.

“The Love Hotel is such a nice place! You’ll love it!” no way he would like it, he was just messing around.

Shuichi made a pretty disgusted expression.

“If you say so…”

Chapter End Notes

Next time Somewhere:
Normally Rantaro’s heart would be filled with happy thoughts but after seeing Ryota’s expression…
The next day, he went to check on Miu, but the girl was not capable of walking yet.

She could not leave the hospital in any case, and her death had not been shown on TV yet. In absence of anything better to do and not really wanting to venture in another episode of Danganronpa, he tried to contact the doctor that was taking care of Kokichi and the others. He found him wandering aimlessly around. The doctor appeared a real lazy person, but Rantaro knew not to let appearances fool him, the doctor had a very strong will. When he noticed him, his expression filled with displeasure, as if he was somehow responsible for others being in a bad state.

“Have you come to disconnect him? It’s almost time.”

“No, that’s not it.” Rantaro tried to stand his ground. “I just want to know how he is doing. And the others too, of course.”

“The others will be fine. A day or two of rest and they will be good to go. As for your friend… 7 days.”

“7 days?!” Rantaro’s heart skipped a beat.

The last time, he said ten weeks!

“Yes, 7 days of the Neo World time. 7 weeks. Not a day more.” the doctor clarified and Rantaro sighed with relief. “Any more than that and his heart will start to suffer. You don’t want him to have a heart attack, right? Not to mention, I have no idea what condition his mind will be in. For now, he seems stable, but there is no telling what will actually happen. He is a first on so many levels.”

“I see… Thank you kindly. I’m grateful for you taking care of them all.” Rantaro bowed, honestly grateful.

“Don’t sugarcoat me, kid. Just remember that his safety takes top priority.” with that, he left.

Of course, Rantaro was not going to risk his life. He prayed strongly for Kokichi to have a clear idea of what he was doing.

The following morning, Chiaki informed him that the investigation was underway and soon they would start the fourth class trial. That gave Rantaro a chill; he was pretty scared of what Kokichi was going to do there. Was he simply going to throw Gonta under the bus? No, it couldn’t be so easy. He wanted to gain the audience’s love; he was going to make this a huge show. It was going to be painful for everyone, inside and outside.

That night in the studio, he was alone, Nagito was absent. Rantaro tried his best but it was impossible to keep all the show to himself, he was no Gundham. He was forced to talk with Shirogane, while she was illustrating the virtual world settings. The audience found the use of the name ‘Neo World Program’ in a virtual world, inside of the Neo World Program funny. Personally, Rantaro found it a joke of real bad taste. When Kokichi and Gonta disappeared together, the camera didn’t follow them. The production wanted to leave a secret what Kokichi had done to Gonta in order to make the trial more interesting. The audience immediately started to comment about Gonta being the next killer nevertheless. Surprisingly though, most of the comments on screen were asking to see what they
were doing because they were afraid Gonta would kill Kokichi. Rantaro remembered that the production had not shown Kokichi placing Miu’s picture next to Gonta. While it was easy to understand what Kokichi was going for even without seeing it, this was Danganronpa, people were expecting a big surprise in this chapter of the show. At least Rantaro had nothing to worry about. The audience was paying close attention at this point, the murder was going to be consumed soon and they knew it.

The following day, Miu called him, completely and utterly bored of being secluded in the hospital. Rantaro reassured her telling her that her murder was going to be shown that night. Miu apparently had decided not to watch the show; she said it made her angry to think back at it. Rantaro asked her how she was feeling, if she was able to walk again and she spat some lines about her being ‘ready to be fucked’ again and something about her ‘hole being good as new’. Rantaro ignored everything.

Nagito was again absent from the studio, Rantaro was starting to worry, but he had not received anything on his cell phone from Hinata-san or Chiaki. Everything should still be fine. It was the night of the murder and while the most likely culprit was already clear, the audience had a lot of fun. Once Kokichi appeared on the screen, alive and well, and Maki started asking to leave the virtual world because Miu’s avatar was unmoving, the audience visibly relaxed. Kokichi really had done it; for the audience to be so relieved that he was alive he really had conquered all of their hearts. While leaving the virtual world, Kokichi asked Shuichi to form an alliance, much to Rantaro’s surprise. What did he had in mind?

-The ship is canon, period-
-Nooo, what are you doing, accept Shuichi!!!-

Rantaro observed, a bit amused at the invasion of fangirls. How many manga was Kokichi planning to inspire? One was already in the making…

His amusement died when he saw Miu’s body in the ‘real world’. Really, adding a virtual world inside a virtual world was a bad idea, it was so confusing. Rantaro had only seen Miu’s chibi body, not the full avatar body one. She was clutching her throat and looked like she suffered a lot. It was a painful sight to look at. It was a good thing that Miu decided not to watch the show.

Monokuma appeared and gave out Monokuma File N4, meanwhile, Kaito barged into the room due to the body discovery announcement waking him up. The footage ended when Kokichi asked Shuichi to not collaborate with Kaito and he appointed himself as his new partner. Rantaro smiled, this must have been a heavenly night for the fujoshi fans, so much material. Kokichi was digging his own grave in the real world. When he woke up, he would be surrounded by screaming fangirls.

Of course, Kokichi was free to pursue a relationship with who he wanted, when he wanted, but considering that he remembered the truth, it made much more sense to think that this was just another part of his strategy. Rantaro was a bit sad at that thought. Kokichi seemed to honestly enjoy the Detective’s company. If he started to play with his feelings like this, there was a possibility that Shuichi would not want to pursue a relationship after the end of the season. That was a very sad thought; Rantaro wanted Kokichi to be happy as well, not only to focus on destroying Danganronpa. No, actually he wanted to be happy above all else, if destroying Danganronpa would sacrifice his happiness, Rantaro would not want to force him. But Kokichi was very stubborn when he wanted to be… He just hoped he knew what he was doing, using Gonta to kill Miu had been bad enough already.

Finally free to leave the hospital, Miu waited for Rantaro to pick her up. She was a bit disappointed that their ride was just a taxi; she was expecting a luxury car. Even the complex earned quite a few complaints. Not to mention that when Rantaro introduced her to the others, she was able to find
something offensive to say to everyone. She was even more obnoxious towards Kaede and Tenko, since she was more familiar with them. In the end, only Kaede joined them on their trip to Ryota’s office and she only did it because she liked Rantaro, her words.

Miu was making multiple strange groans and moans all the way to the sixth floor. She seemed to like the Danganronpa headquarters a lot. This was a place where she would want to work. Rantaro was suspecting that if he had not recruited her, she would have probably applied to the company to work for them. Hopefully, meeting Ryota would be enough the keep her in line. Rantaro was feeling a bit bad about this, to drop another burden on Ryota’s shoulders was not very merciful. As Rantaro predicted, she immediately fell in love with his office. She sprinted at the monitors and tried to button mash at the control panel, only to be stopped by a panicked Ryota. Rantaro apologized to him and tried to introduce them. The girl was not really paying attention, she even ignored her cue to say ‘nice to meet you’, and the first thing that came out of her mouth was something much less pleasant.

“Hey, hey! You can see everything with these, right?! Does this mean that you can see the guys showering? Tell me, did any of them ever got off screaming my name?!”

Ryota was staring at her with his mouth open, while Kaede was massaging her eyes. She kept going, ignoring the mixed reactions.

“Ah wait, you’re a guy, so maybe you weren’t looking at the guys showering… OH MY GOD, did you spy on me getting off?! Do you have a recording? It’s just… for educative purposes…” she started playing with her hair.

Ryota was still staring at her, his true reaction delayed by shock. Rantaro took pity on him and decided to save him.

“Do you know what’s up with Nagito? He disappeared without warning; it’s already been two days since he’s come to the studio.”

Ryota finally reacted, slowly.

“Ah, hm…” he collected his thoughts for a moment. “Seiko-san was released from the hospital she was being treated. Hajime, Nagito and Byakuya-kun took a couple days off to help her get settled. She is still quite delicate as you can imagine.”

“Oh! I see! I’m glad.”

At least they were gone for a happy reason.

“I wanted to say this too… Gokuhara-san will be waking up in a few hours. He was… executed earlier.” Ryota’s gaze shifted, like he was uncomfortable.

“Is there something wrong?” Rantaro was starting to worry, did something happened to Kokichi?

“Here,” he handed him a USB, “take the day off from the studio and watch the trial… Ah, but first you should watch the investigation, tonight they are going to show an important part, you should definitely see it…”

There was something very unsettling about the way he was talking. It was as if something horrible had happened.

“Is Leader okay?” he needed to ask.

“I… guess? Physically he should be okay…” okay, this was a terrifying answer. “Please, watch at
the trial yourself, I don’t know him as well as you do.”

Rantaro tried to drag Miu out of the room, but she was drooling all over a monitor that was showing a complex sequence of code. Kaede offered to wait for her and told him to hurry back so he could watch the trial, and so he did, after thanking her.

Rantaro watched the show with impatience, every second wasted was long like a day for him. He soon understood what Ryota had meant when he said that it was important. Shuichi and Kokichi were flirting while collecting clues. He was not really sure they were aware of what they were doing, but there was no mistaking it. Kokichi was being uncharacteristically clingy, following the Detective with every step, and Shuichi was more relaxed than usual, exchanging little jokes with him. Normally Rantaro’s heart would be filled with happy thoughts, but after seeing Ryota’s expression… He was starting to feel dread wash all over him.

The audience was enjoying this investigation and mystery. It was indeed well planned and for once, since they had a culprit in mind from the start, they could actually put all the pieces together without Shuichi’s help. Rantaro recalled something Kokichi mentioned once, inside the Funhouse, when talking about the previous murders. He said ‘investigating with a clear suspect in mind makes the perspective a lot different’. He was referring to Mikan at that time. This was the case, normally the audience would rely on Shuichi or Nagito and him to solve the case for them, this time they had an advantage and they were using it. The show ended after showing Shuichi asking Kokichi to join him for a second look in the virtual world and then worrying about him when he refused. Rantaro had the strange impulse to cry.

He had a very bad feeling about all this.

Chapter End Notes

Next time on Present Side:
He regretted having sent Shuichi to this particular mission at night, even though it was really the only possibility.

Thank you for the 400 kudos <3 <3
Immediately after Shuichi left, Kokichi got ready to act.

It was time to start the first phase of his plan, he would attract the audience’s attention, giving Shuichi time to move around and do what he had to. Leaving the Lab, he took the Bugvacuum, he needed to make sure the programmers were suspicious of him and more focused on what he was doing rather than following Shuichi around. Having the Bugvacuum was a clear proof that Kokichi was going to pull some shenanigans, while Shuichi, who was moving in total legality, was a less likely suspect. And of course, he had told him just how many things he needed to do at a time to make sure they couldn’t get the full picture.

He activated the Bugvacuum after leaving his Lab, discretely he made his way outside. The others were in the dining room eating dinner the last time he checked. Kokichi was pleased to see that his new partner had followed his instructions while exploring the school earlier in search for the second writing. The ladder was hidden exactly where Kokichi told him. Shuichi was a really good person since he agreed to bring the ladder out in the garden from the gym, the thing was stupidly heavy. As quickly as possible, he placed it against the wall of the building, he climbed on the little balcony that was right above the door.

He sat there sighing heavily, now he had to wait. If Shuichi was going to follow his instructions, in the next few minutes he would appear, grab the ladder and hide it behind the school dorm, effectively making it impossible to reach him. There was no escape route from there, he tried breaking the window but there was an invisible wall protecting it and even if he could, there was still barbered wire on the other side. He had to jump down to escape. He could have chosen a place less high up but theatric was paramount for this scene, they had to think he was capable of doing impossible things. He hoped the programmers would not add the ‘broken leg’ effect, that would be nasty. In such a delicate situation, he could only trust Shuichi to save his life.

When his partner appeared, they nodded to each other and Shuichi slowly brought the ladder away from view. Shuichi had asked him if it would be better to hide it even farther away, but Kokichi told him it was only important to keep them from getting to him for a while, until the moment they remembered that there was indeed a ladder in the building. Furthermore, it was really bad if anyone had caught them before Shuichi could get away, it was bad to waste too much time. Kokichi sighed again watching him enter the building after having completed his task. Public appearances had become such a pain without the Exisals’ help. He turned off the Bugvacuum.

After waiting for a long time, Kokichi wondered if Shuichi had been a good liar and they were having a nice dinner together, or if he had screwed up and now they were tying him up and locking him into Ryoma’s shower room. If his confident nod had been any indicator, Kokichi was pretty sure that the other task had been completed as well. It was already getting dark when they finally left the building, chatting all together. They weren’t suspecting a thing, it seemed. Good, Shuichi was capable of keeping the act consistent as well.

“What, my fellow last survivors of the human race!” Kokichi yelled on top of his lungs as soon as they started to make their way to the dorm with his arms wide open. “Have you all enjoyed the nice meal that I prepared for you like good friends? Where is my share? You are all a bunch of ungrateful leeches!”
They all turned to search for his voice with tense expressions on their faces, except for Shuichi who was not really good with fake facial expressions. It was Kiibo the first one to spot him.

“There!”

“What are you doing there, come down here, I wanna punch you for this shit!” Momota-chan was as classy as ever.

“Wow, wow there! So aggressive! And to think I took time out of my busy day to get myself a hostage and then another one offers himself as a hostage, and to think! That person lied to me! They broke their promise!” Kokichi faked a pout.

“Of course I broke the promise,” Shuichi said his line with a convincing tone, “a promise made to a liar is worth less than zero.”

“Uhh, that burns!” Kokichi grimaced comically.

“This is your entire fault, you got what you deserve!” Momota-chan showed his fist in triumph. “Now we’re going to catch you and you’re gonna tell us everything you know! We’re going to get back home, I don’t care if you say Earth is destroyed, I don’t believe you!”

“No, we should do something more fun.” Kokichi interrupted him with nonchalance. “What we should do is punish the person that betrayed his promise to me and escaped. I’m not happy about that, Saihara-chan! You really broke my heart! So, what I’m gonna do is catch our little Mister Detective and kill him for his insolence. You can watch, it’s going to be fun!”

“The hell we’re going to let you do what you want anymore!” Momota-chan shouted and all the others agreed in the background. “You are not going to punish Shuichi, he’s done nothing wrong! You said you’d punish only the killers!”

“Oh, these old rules? Those were for the experiment. It’s over now, as I already said. So now, I’m free to kill you all whenever I want.”

“You are not getting anywhere near Shuichi! I won’t let you!” Momota-chan shouted, a note of desperation in his voice.

Yumeno-chan was shivering in fear and anxiety, Shirogane was crying silently, Kiibo was just staring at him with anger and Killer Girl Girlfriend had her usual knife pulled out. This was working nicely. Now he had to pull some idiocy out of his ass, otherwise they would notice he was not capable of calling the Exisals and make them kill them all.

“Hmmm… Well… Maybe there is a way you can keep your little boy toy there…” he placed a finger on his lips, faking a look of concentration. “Ah, yeah, of course! You know, I get bored easily, so the best thing you all can do is to keep me entertained! In the end, we are the last survivors of humanity and to lose even a single one of you would mean to have even fewer chances to be entertained. So… as long as you do something interesting, I guess I can keep you all alive! You can be my pets!”

“Screw you!” Momota-chan was getting ready to throw a tantrum, but his health was still keeping him at bay for now.

“Well, I’ll prepare a game! A little treasure hunt all over the spaceship!” he nodded looking cheerful. “Tomorrow, at 8 am, the hunt will start and you’ll have until 8 pm to complete it. If you can complete it in time, I’ll let Boy Toy live, if you fail I’ll kill him. This is fair, right?”
“Fair my ass! I’ll punch you into the orbit right now!” Momota-chan was barking loudly as always, but still not giving any concrete solution.

This was the moment where Shuichi had to come into play.

“Kaito, there is a ladder in the gym, let’s get it! We can catch him before he runs away!” there he was, the line he suggested himself.

“You can all go, I’ll stay here and make sure he doesn’t escape from there.” Killer Girlfriend was still staring at him.

Now, this was the decisive moment. Was Shuichi capable of lying well enough to save his life?

“No, Harukawa-san. You have to come! The ladder is heavy and Kaito is not feeling well! I can’t carry it alone! I need your help!”

She frowned deeply, but fell into the trap.

“All right, I’ll go. Kiibo, you watch over him.”

“W-what? Why me?!” Kiibo was panicking.

“Because you have the strength of a senior citizen, right? You are useless.” she was savage as usual.

“N-no, no! I’m coming too! I’ll… I’ll help!” Kiibo was too afraid to stay there alone with him.

Of course, Yumeno-chan and Shirogane were already out of view as soon as Shuichi had proposed to fight. Good thing Gonta was not around anymore. As Kokichi was thinking that, he felt like a real bastard.

“All right, whatever, let’s hurry!” Shuichi hastened their decision, good work.

In a moment, they were all out of sight. Kokichi immediately climbed over the walls and hung by his arms, getting as close to the ground as possible before letting himself fall. The contact with the ground was painful, but he was still in one piece, maybe broken bones were not a thing in the Neo World Program. Kokichi couldn’t remember if it ever happened.

He ran inside and opened his secret entrance as fast as possible; he needed to get out of the way real fast. Inside, right under the tile, he found three cans of red paint. Kokichi smiled, Shuichi had completed his mission perfectly. He closed the tile, grabbed the cans and dragged them into his Lab. All the twists and turns made him reach the end of the tunnel panting with fatigue. Was it normal that he was feeling so tired after doing so little? He had slept most of the day.

Kokichi turned on the Bugvacuum again and started working on the treasure hunt. He was not trying to keep it a secret; he just wanted to make an entertaining show for the audience. He didn’t trust the production not to show what he was doing, a hunt was only fun if you played along. In the meantime, his partner and the other idiots were running around aimlessly. They didn’t find the ladder and he had disappeared. Miss Girlfriend was especially displeased. Kokichi worked until midnight, he needed to make the hunt as long as possible, since he needed them to lose. Shuichi couldn’t just act like an idiot the entire time, they would suspect something was up, he needed to play along as well, while maybe not with the same drive.

Kokichi laid on his mattress, for the first time alone, wondering if Shuichi had successfully gotten the two Love Keys he asked for. It was not a fundamental part of the plan, if he couldn’t, they could just keep using the Lab and that would be fine too. A change of scenery, especially that one, would be
good though. At least they would both enter it while still awake so there was no chance of the same
dreadful mistake as last time. Kokichi didn’t want to be a part of Killer Girl’s sexual fantasy,
whatever that may have been.

He tried to get some sleep, he was really tried, but his mind just didn’t want to stop working. He
wrapped himself in two layers of blanket rolling around, but he didn’t get any warmer. Were the
programmers really so lazy? He regretted having sent Shuichi to this particular mission at night, even
though it was really the only possibility. He was missing Shuichi’s warmth already.

He hoped his partner in crime would not get cold, being up all night.

Chapter End Notes

Next time Somewhere:
Don’t worry! I wouldn’t ask for something obscene or dangerous! Don’t tell you have
forgotten! We made a bet, didn’t we?

I have another Oasis ready, contrary to my expectation, so tomorrow there is that again.
See ya :3
Before the trial, there was a cute sequence that Rantaro observed with great interest.

Shuichi had made a bet with Kokichi. Rantaro could see the spark of excitement in his Leader’s eyes, but it quickly died. He was even more worried now. He knew how much Kokichi enjoyed being challenged; to see him lose interest so quickly was not a good sign at all.

The trial started rather normally, Kokichi was heavily controlling the flow of the arguments, but that was almost completely normal. ‘Almost’ because this time, Kokichi was actually playing around with Shuichi, mostly the debate was between the two of them. Normally he was controlling the flow by just adding some comments here and there. Around the halfway point, though, Kokichi revealed a detail about the scene of the crime he was not supposed to know, Rantaro was sure he revealed it on purpose, and he was suspected. Surprisingly Shuichi immediately cleared Kokichi’s name. Or maybe, now that he was thinking about it properly, it was not surprising at all. The Detective was now used to his antics, so he was capable of remaining focused. Since Kokichi being the culprit was impossible, he just followed logic to the correct solution, contrary to all the others.

When Shuichi asked for an explanation, things started to get out of hand, Kokichi threw Gonta under the bus just like that, after giving them the illusion that he was about to confess himself. Gonta started crying and Rantaro was thrown out of the loop, why was he acting like this? He agreed to the plan himself. Clearly, Kokichi was thinking the same thing as he started to shout at him in pure rage. Rantaro had heard Kokichi yell and scream a bunch of times, but this was completely different. This was a voice Rantaro had never heard in his life, it was raw and feral. Kokichi was seriously shouting all his anger at Gonta. He must had been tired, maybe sad, or maybe even mentally compromised, because Rantaro was sure the normal Kokichi would have never done something like that. Unless there was something else going on in his head. That didn’t look like an act at all though, it was painfully realistic.

Then he started to laugh. Rantaro thought it could not get worse, but suddenly it got much worse. His laughter was so creepy, evil, and full of hate to send a powerful chill down his spine. And he got way more vulgar too, spitting insults right and left. What was he doing? What was wrong with him?? Not only that, Kokichi was purposely prodding at Kaito and even dragging Shuichi into the mess, using him as a kind of human shield against the Astronaut.

“I’m sick of hearing you say you don’t know! God, why are you so dumb?! You wanna help everyone like a true gentleman?! Then actually start to act like one and confess the truth! What do you think you are doing here?! Argue back already; just make an excuse or whatever!”

Rantaro stopped the video, got up and hurried to the bathroom where he splashed his face with water. He was not sure he could take any more of this. Kokichi’s voice had stretched beyond recognition making him sound like a completely different person. His face was full of hate and rage. There was nothing of Leader in him. If Rantaro had not seen the video, but only heard the voice he would never, not even in million years, recognize it as Kokichi’s.

It took him a while of breathing fresh air to go back to the sofa. He was feeling something painful in his stomach, like a marble of magma. Luckily, he found out that this was the end of it, after that Shuichi took control of everything again and the trial was concluded by him while Kokichi looked almost absent. Like he had used all his energy in one go. They voted and Gonta was chosen as the
culprit even if someone voted for Kokichi. Probably Kaito, Rantaro could not blame him too much for that, even if it was against Leader.

Monokuma pulled out a computer and ‘Alter Ego Gonta’, or more precisely the residue of memories that Gonta lost in the virtual world, started to explain about the flashback light and the truth of the outside world. Rantaro braced himself for the big guy’s execution and then relaxed a bit after everything had ended. Kokichi had obtained his objective, the audience was surely going to love all this, and it was too filled with despair to not be attractive.

Rantaro had chosen the wrong moment to relax.

When Kokichi, wiping away his tears, started shouting again, he got goosebumps all over. The string of insults that came out of his mouth, directed at Kaito and the others, was so long and full of anger that he couldn’t really register all of it, it was just too much. He was paralyzed on his sofa, with his mouth open, as Kokichi punched Kaito and kept ranting about him even as he was on the floor. Then he shouted against Shuichi as well. The things that were coming out of his mouth.

The footage ended with him riding the elevator, while all the others were left behind.

Rantaro was beyond shocked. He started pacing around the living room, trying to calm down. Was all of this part of Kokichi’s plan? Was this staged? Or was this real? Were those Kokichi’s true feelings? Or maybe he was being affected by the Neo World Program exposition and now he was going crazy. That was possible. Rantaro could not believe that Leader, in his right mind, would ever say those things. Or so he thought until he could actually calm down a bit and think things through rationally.

Sitting down again, he analyzed the scene that just played all over again in his mind. Kokichi was not simply hurting them. He was hurting himself, he was hurt himself. This was not a staged reaction or a plan, this was a genuine reaction of a normal person that had just gone through in the order: discovering all their memories were a lie, discovering he was inside a virtual world, discovering he had volunteered to take part in all this, making someone kill someone, having to send that person to death as well. Hell, it was only human that he would snap at some point!

Now that the shock had faded, he actually realized the sadness of the situation. Kokichi just pushed someone he collaborated with to death and then cut the only human connection he had made inside this twisted universe. On top of that, he just made himself unforgivable and the only person that was still willing to take his hands now hated him as well. This was very tragic.

In Rantaro’s mind, Kokichi was, of course, a human being, but a very strong one. He would never have predicted him being crushed by the pressure like this.

‘Oh, God, what I’m going to tell the others? Maybe we should disconnect him after all…’

It was very late at night, but he needed to know right now. He knocked on everyone’s door and gathered all the ones that were living there in his living room. There was a vast assortment of pajamas and sleepy faces, but they sensed his tension and went with him without questioning him. Kaede asked him wordlessly if he was all right and Rantaro, not wanting to lie, shook his head.

Re-watching the trial with them was just as painful as the first time, maybe more so, since there were confused questions, tears and sound of discomfort coming from all over the place. In the end, as was predictable, almost all of them were asking ‘what happened to him?’. Rantaro tried to subdue the chaotic mess in his living room, but it was not easy, everyone was talking at once and arguing their point. It was Kaede the first one to snap.
“Silence, all of you!” she got up and shouted. “With the exception of Gundham, none of you has the right to speak right now. You either didn’t kill and never experienced the pain that this brings upon you or you killed for a completely different reason that kept you going even through despair! Kokichi killed for a meaningless reason, he wanted to obtain the prize and wins the audience’s love. Can you really say you are qualified to ask ‘what’s gotten into him?!’ right now? Do you have any idea how hard this is to go through?”

She was already crying by that point. Rantaro got up and hugged her; she hid her face in his shirt.

“There is not much to ask, I would say.” a completely unexpected voice come from the entrance area. Korekiyo was standing there, looking completely at ease, even though no one invited him in. “He just had a mental breakdown, it’s only human…” he noticed them all staring. “Oh, I apologize. I heard quite the ruckus in here, so I thought I’d come take a look. By the way, if you want to know if you should pull him out of there or not… Why don’t ask the person who was most involved in all this? Hear what he has to say about all this.” with that, he left.

“The Child of the Devil that partakes in forbidden activities may have a point.” Gundham broke the silence. “We should ask the one misfortune was brought upon by Leader. He may not want his sacrifice to be in vain.”

It was decided. Rantaro would speak with Gonta about Kokichi’s fate.

It was late evening when finally Rantaro and Kaede, who offered immediately to accompany him, had permission to enter the ex-Entomologist room. He was definitely calmer than Miu while certainly more confused. When they entered the room, he stared at them with wide eyes.

“Rantaro? Kaede? Is this heaven? Gonta in heaven?”

Rantaro smiled reassuringly and patted the big guy on the shoulder.

“Most definitely not, my friend. You are alive and well, you have just been rescued from the place you were trapped in, everything is fine now.”

“So Gonta not executed? Gonta rescued? Gonta doesn’t remember what happened during the execution, everything was blur.”

“Yes, that is normal, no one remembers their execution, because…” Kaede looked at Rantaro and he nodded. They had talked about this earlier and concluded that it was best to tell him only about the show, leaving the Neo World Program aside. It was not as if they wanted to keep it a secret, it was just that Gonta clearly didn’t understand anything about virtual reality, even inside, let alone outside. “…because it was all an act. It was staged, you were actually put to sleep and brought here, what the other saw was just an illusion, something like a movie, do you understand?”

Rantaro had asked Kaede if she remembered her execution and surprisingly she said that she didn’t. Using text messages, he had asked Hinata-san why and he had answered that to avoid problems and make the whole sequence as dramatic as they wanted it, it was just the avatar body that was executed. They disconnected the mind at the start of it, moving the avatar as they pleased afterward. It was good that they could not recollect those terrible moments; Rantaro himself didn’t remember anything about dying, only getting hit and then darkness. It was surely out of a self-serving reason, not to help the participants, but still it was pretty nice of them to let them have at least that.

Explaining everything to Gonta was complicated, even leaving out the Neo World Program, he was still struggling with the concept of this being a TV show. Rantaro told him everything, about Kokichi remembering it was a show, about him using Gonta to get a prize, about not knowing what the prize
was. If this decision was to be decided by Gonta, he needed to have all the information in an impartial way. It would be easy to take advantage of his selfless nature to get the result Rantaro wanted, but that was not the point. Rantaro had even brought a clip of the scene immediately after the execution; of course, he had cut out the execution. Gonta was even more confused by end of everything.

“Why didn’t Kokichi tell Gonta it was a show?”

“It’s not so simple Gonta, if he had, Monokuma would have known and he would have done something to make sure the information was not given to the others as well. He would have probably eliminated both you and Kokichi or wiped your memory. Kokichi knew this.”

“But then why make Gonta see the secret of the outside world?”

“I won’t lie, that was a cruel move on his part. He just wanted to make you hasten your decision when Miu tried to kill Kokichi. He wanted to make sure you felt pressured to do something. He forced the decision onto you.”

“Gonta see… Gonta would not kill Miu if not for flashback light. Gonta would have protected Kokichi and let Miu go. Gonta thought he had to do it, to help all friends.” he hung his head.

“It’s okay Gonta, I know how you feel. You don’t have to feel responsible at all, you tried your best.” Kaede rubbed gently his arm.

“Gonta, are you mad at Kokichi?” Rantaro had to ask.

“No, not at all. In the end, Gonta was right, Kokichi is helping friends. In a strange way, but helping. And Gonta see Kokichi blame himself for Gonta actions. Gonta blame self many times, Gonta recognize it. Gonta want to tell Kokichi not to treat friends badly, Kokichi will regret it.” he was sad but not uncertain.

“You can’t be sure he did this for your good. He probably didn’t think about your good at all, he just had his own agenda. You shouldn’t forgive him so easily.” Rantaro was not really sure what he was doing right now.

“Kokichi has good friend in Rantaro. Rantaro worried and sad about this. Gonta not smart, but Gonta see Kokichi is cared for. And Kokichi talk with Gonta a lot about bugs.” after a moment of pause, he changed the subject. “Gonta want to apologize to Miu. Then Kokichi apologize to Miu as well and everyone is friend again.”

Having received the big guy’s blessing for the operation, Rantaro spent the rest of the evening mentally preparing for the following night, when they would show the trial on TV. This was going to be either a total hit or a total miss for Kokichi. His presence on the show was resting entirely on the audience, whether they liked or hated something like this. He watched the trial another time, trying to find something to say, but… he could not find anything. There was nothing Rantaro could say to this, neither positive nor negative. And the trial was so long and had a fast pace, that he doubted he had time to say anything even if he wanted.

After a sleepless night, Rantaro found Nagito waiting for him outside of the studio. He was leaning against a wall, looking perfectly at ease.

“Sorry, I had some business to take care.” he smiled. “I’ve seen the trial. Impressive, do you think that was an act?”

“No, it was not an act.” Rantaro answered in spite of himself.
“Hmm, yeah, I guess so. Ready for the night?” he brushed off the topic quickly.

“Ready as I’ll ever be…” he sighed deeply.

“Don’t worry! I wouldn’t ask for something obscene or dangerous!” Nagito looked honestly appealed at the thought. Rantaro was lost. What was he talking about? “Don’t tell you have forgotten! We made a bet, didn’t we? Whether Kokichi would use Gonta to kill or not? I won, but don’t worry! I’ll not ask for a too hard of a punishment!”

Rantaro stared at him with his mouth open. He had completely forgotten all about it.

Was this guy being for real?

Chapter End Notes

Next time on Present Side:
Don’t worry. I just thought it was a pity to never use this place for anything, that’s all. Sheesh, you should thank me, instead of scolding me!

This sentence:
Probably Kaito, Rantaro could not blame him too much for that, even if it was against Leader.
is referring to the many occasions where I heard 'Kokichi deserved it so I can't blame Kaito for it'.
I can understand if people don't want to forgive Kokichi, that's fine by me, but I really don't like the fact that they ignore the point:
Kaito tried to kill them all just because he was pissed.
So here I purposefully added that mentality, don't be mad at Rantaro ahaha
Kokichi woke up at four in the morning.

Even though he didn’t feel rested, he was grateful he had woke up so early. Now he had all the time to prepare the treasure hunt in peace before anyone would interfere. Assuming Killer Girl was not taking a stroll around to catch him with his pants down. Even if, he had to do it. If he died… Well, that’s that.

Gathering all the little pieces of paper, the last paint can and one of the three Electrobombs inside the last plastic bag, he grabbed the Bugvacuum with the other hand and prepared to leave. He briefly considered eating a pack of cookies, but his stomach was pretty upset at the moment. He took it with him, for later. At the entrance of the tunnel that led to his secret base, on the ground, was a shiny little key. Shuichi had done his part already. Smiling he picked it up and hid it in his pants pocket. Since he already had the Love Key, he was not going to return to his Lab for the day, he would be out for 24 hours. Leaving the bag there, he went back and collected some more food. He was pretty sure there was none inside the Love Suite.

He visited places all over the map, one by one, exchanging the pieces of paper for an object inside the rooms. First, his dorm room, then the kitchen, the Assassin Lab and the Detective Lab. After he secured everything he needed, he abandoned the items in Shuichi’s Lab for the time being and placed the other pieces of paper in the rooms he had chosen for the riddles. He visited all the Labs, all the three empty rooms, the male and female bathrooms, the warehouse, the gym, the dining room, the library, the AV room and game room. All the classrooms, as well as the computer room. He had chosen to visit the places he needed to first, in case someone would be already out and about, but his confidence grew as time passed. No one was around. The treasure hunt was really long, as it was completely pointless, they would waste a lot of time with this, Kokichi was sure. Last, he visited Shirogane’s Lab. He opened the can of red paint and wrote on the wall, ‘This world is mine, Kokichi Ouma’. It was stupid and childish, but he didn’t care. He was sure she would be pissed for this clear attack on her specifically. Feeling proud of himself, he retrieved all the objects from Shuichi’s Lab and reached the Love Hotel, opening the door with the Love Key. Monokuma, as was predictable, popped out.

“Hey, hey! This is not how this place should work! You are supposed to come here while you sleep!”

“You’re still going on about that? C’mon no one is going to use it that way! Can’t I use this place to meet up with my beloved?” he pouted. “He has a Key, you know he does, so there is no problem. He’ll join me later.”

“Hmmm… I dunno what you are scheming… But this treasure hunt idea is not too shabby. I guess I can allow this. But you know!” he showed his claws, angry. “I didn’t like your little play the other day. It was not as grandiose as you promised! I’ll keep a closer eye on you from now on, I know that you are lying to me!”

This was good, the more they focused on him, the less they would focus on Shuichi.

“Sure, whatever. I failed. Big deal! It happens you know! It’s not like you are infallible either! And don’t tell me that my little meddling didn’t please the audience, because I don’t believe you.”
Kokichi looked at his nails, faking superiority.

“What do you have in that bag?” the change of topic was too sudden, Monokuma didn’t want to give him any info about the audience.

“Don’t tell me… I earned another prize and you don’t want to give it to me!” he pouted again.

“Your prize is to still be alive, I’m very displeased about you, you know? You are being way too sly…” he showed his claws again. “I’m not even sure anymore that you want to win this. It’s almost like you want Shuichi to win now.”

If this was the conclusion the programmers and producers had reached, it just meant that his little plan was still running low, unnoticed. It was very good news.

“Is there something bad about that?” he tried to sound as nonchalant as possible. “I thought I could win alone by crushing their spirits and then crushing them one by one, but that didn’t come to pass… You know my wish, I wanted a true friend. Saihara-chan is smart and good looking, you already knew he’s my type. He reached out to me… Why should I refuse him? I want to win together with him now, is there something bad about that?”

“Is that so? So what is this little farce you are pushing forward? Romeo and Juliet?”

So, the programmers really could not read him writing on Shuichi’s chest. Good to know.

“Everyone loves Romeo and Juliet!” he yelled as if Monokuma was being stupid. “The audience surely love us playing the betrayal game, right? Who cares what is a lie and what isn’t! What counts is the feeling! And you call yourself a mascot?!?”

“Tsk! I’ve been doing this job since before you were born, you cocky brat, don’t patronize me!”

This was a strange answer; Kokichi could almost see an old man ranting behind Monokuma now. Maybe it was exactly like that; maybe he was being controlled by an old man.

“Then do a better job! Instead of trying to harass me, help me keep this thing interesting! So, do I deserve a prize or not?” he asked forcefully.

Monokuma stayed silent for a while, visibly annoyed.

“It depends on what you want, cocky bastard.” he answered in the end.

“Just let me make an announcement using the monitors tomorrow morning. I just need to say a couple things.”

Monokuma went silent again, this time the person controlling him was surely arguing with the others behind Danganronpa about his proposal.

“What you want to announce? I can register your voice right now, if I like what you want to say, that is.” he compromised.

Kokichi hesitated a moment, this could be bad, they could figure out a part of his plan… But at the same time, he could not bargain too much with him right now, he was in a disadvantaged position.

“I want to say this.” Kokichi took a deep breath and started to act in his best cheerful voice. “You guys are seriously useless! I gave you twelve hours and you couldn’t solve a treasure hunt meant for children! Well then, as you may have already noticed, I took your precious little Boy Toy. Ah, but
I’m not jealous, I can share, why don’t you go to the hanger? He is there! Have a nice day!’”

Kokichi and Monokuma stared at each other in silence for a while.

“This meant to go on in case they fail, right?” Monokuma asked.

“Yes!” Kokichi put his hands behind his head. “I’ll drag them into a trap.”

“You never answered, what’s inside that bag?” Monokuma asked again.

“A change of clothes and a couple murder weapons.” Kokichi answered easily. “Didn’t you know already?”

“I think I’m starting to get a picture of what you want to do… Do you intend to have another class trial or not?”

What Monokuma was actually asking was whether Kokichi was planning to kill them all in one go and win like this. If he answered that no, he didn’t intend to have another class trial, Monokuma would probably refuse to cooperate. He probably wanted to drag the season for as long as possible, until it became boring. As long as it was interesting, the longer it went on, the better. If he was to answer yes, that he intended to have a class trial, Monokuma would probably question what was his plan for not being caught and get killed in an execution. Supposedly, Kokichi wanted to win, so losing a class trial would mark him as a liar.

“Now, now! Evil Supreme Leaders don’t just sell off their plans like this! Was I not perfectly capable of handling Gonta’s trial? You have nothing to fear. I even have the Ultimate Detective on my side now; it’s not possible for me to lose.”

“Oh, I see, you intend to get them killed by winning a class trial! This is quite interesting, it would be a first!” Monokuma suddenly was very excited. Then it went into silent mode again.

Kokichi realized, for a second he saw the actual person behind Monokuma talking. That was the person on the staff speaking. So, a class trial had never been won by a killer before? Well, now he knew what to avoid at all costs. Something new like this would only do the show well.

“Yuuup! Darn it! You figured out! Isn’t that a great idea? Shuichi and I both will kill someone and then kill the others in the class trial. So we will be both culprits and we will both win in one go. What do you say?” he smiled proudly.

“It’s not a bad idea…” now the ‘professional Monokuma role-player’ was speaking again. “I think I’ll go along with it, if they can’t finish the treasure hunt, that is. I hope you planned it out well.”

“Of course I did, I’m not a sloppy ass like you!” he stuck his tongue.

“All right, all right… I’ll let you stay in here for a while, but don’t make a camp in there. Use you Lab for this stuff, we gave it to you specifically for that purpose!” Monokuma scolded him.

“Don’t worry, don’t worry. I just thought it was a pity to never use this place for anything, that’s all. Sheesh, you should thank me, instead of scolding me!”

“Whether you deserve to be thanked or not we’ll see soon enough. Good luck little Leader!”

Kokichi didn’t want anything to do with Danganronpa’s luck at all. One Nagito was already enough. Kokichi chose the first door and left it open, just in case someone had decided to take a nap clutching
a Love Key right at that time. Kokichi would not put it past Monokuma to send them straight to him to get some laugh out of it, especially considering what happened last time. Kokichi abandoned the plastic bag in a corner and collapsed on the bed, sighing loudly. He had twelve hours of waiting ahead of him.

Examining the room, just to waste some time, he remembered the shower that was in the bathroom area. He really fancied a shower, he wanted to warm up, a bath would be even better. He nodded at the large bathtub in the bathroom, that looked alright. It was sized for two people or more, obviously considering the theme of the building, and Kokichi just hoped it had never been used before. Except for Shuichi, he didn’t want to bathe in the same bathtub one of the others had used, the thought of it was just disgusting. He reminded himself that no one was stupid enough to waste a lot of time just to get the stupid Key, surely, it was never used. He started to strip, when he remembered that this place was a thing. The programmers would never add this place if it wasn’t to sell some porn to the outside world. That thought was even more disgusting, but more importantly… didn’t that mean that inside this place, nudity wouldn’t get censored? Kokichi absolutely didn’t want to be butt naked on TV. If Iruma-chan did something good in her whole life, it surely was the Bugvacuum.

Kokichi placed it right next to the bathtub, activating it. He stripped and immersed himself in hot water up to his chin with a sigh of delight. The hot water was such a good sensation. He wanted to turn into a fish and submerge completely.

Now he had only to wait for Shuichi.

Chapter End Notes

Next time Somewhere:
I heard from Seiko you want to stop Danganronpa. If it’s true then why are you all cooperating with him?
Rantaro was sitting on his usual white sofa.

The trial had started half an hour ago and the internet was already overflowing with comments. Most people were already miles ahead of the participants and had already solved the case. To be fair, they had seen Kokichi’s room while Shuichi could not, it was a bit unfair. Surprisingly, the main focus of the trial for most people was not the case, but the Kokichi/Shuichi dynamic on the screen. They were commenting every exchange they had and craving for more, while some were already ‘crying’ just thinking what reaction Shuichi could have at the big reveal.

-You think is Oumasai or Saiouma?-

-I’m crying, don’t sink my ship! T^T-

-Ouma is a top-

-I dunno… maybe he is secretly searching for someone to dominate him :P-

-Shuichi is not capable of dominating a rabbit-

-Poor kid, cut him some slack! Maybe he will learn someday ;-) -

-Do you realize they are going to split up soon, right?! What are all happy for?!-

Rantaro was starting to be afraid of the world. Was the world okay?

His attention was divided between the two screens.

“You keep talking like this; you sound just like Monokuma… You are a coward; you never speak the truth or show your true face!”

-Buuu, shut up, you told Shuichi you were eaten by a whale, shut it, really-

-Well, Kokichi is black and white, as well as, Monokuma, do you think this was intentional?-

“Can you please shut up for a moment?”

“Nooope! I’m gonna talk until the moment I die!”

“I don’t doubt that.”

-Aww, look how cute they are! :3-

-I’m crying so hard right now, help T^T-

No, the answer was no, the world was not okay.

“Wow! You are an amazing Detective Saihara-chan! I knew that our lives were safe in your hands!”

“Oh, don’t give me that. This is your deduction, I’m not gonna take the credit for this. So you had already her trick completely figured out. If you already know the culprit, just say so!”
“No, I don’t know yet! But this trial has finally reached the exciting part! Let’s work harder Saihara-chan!”

-ARGH, my kokoro! T^T-
-Why they can’t keep working together like this for the rest of the game?!!-
-Let’s start a petition! We want a spin-off with those two!-

“How do you know so much about the murder scene, you weren’t there!”

“Well, Saihara-chan? Do you know how the killer is?”

“Well, not you.”

-Oh no, here we are!-

-All ready? Better brace yourself there!-

“Ah, by the way. The killer is Gonta!”

And the internet exploded. The comments were scrolling up so fast Rantaro could not read even a single one. Chiaki started to regulate the influx and the screen went back to normal, but Rantaro knew she had just activated the slow mode. The comments were still pouring out like crazy. Nagito clapped three times, signaling that he had won the bet; Rantaro grimaced in an exaggerated way to admit defeat. Then hell started once again, it was already the fourth time Rantaro saw this scene. He focused completely on reading the comments, instead of listening again, but he tried to show confusion, fear and hurt as well. He scratched his head nervously, played with his shirt, tapped a finger and hid his face with his hands; in the meantime, Nagito was looking as smug as possible.

The comments were completely filled with confusion, hurt, disappointment and harsh words. Gonta’s crying was getting everyone’s empathy. If you can consider empathy as a genuine feeling from someone that watches killing games for entertainment. Rantaro started to sweat. Was this going to get him the opposite effect? It seemed like the audience now hated him, rather than loved him. The long and painful experience stretched until the vote. It calmed down during the explanation Gonta gave of his crime, while they knew it was just a setting, it looked like Gonta had made the choice on his own, so it was not all Kokichi’s fault even if he was behaving like a real jerk.

And then the post-execution happened. Once again, the comments started to throw hate at Kokichi in full force. Rantaro’s heart was beating excessively fast with fear. At least he didn’t have to fake it for the audience. Were they going to kill him off because he was now hated? Well, maybe that would even be an act of mercy. They could try ending Danganronpa again next year. Or so Rantaro tried to tell himself, in actuality there was probably no way to end it. If Kokichi was not capable, then it was unlikely anyone could. But Rantaro still rather have him back right now, here, where he could protect him properly.

The trial had been way too long, they had to go outside the usual time slot that Danganronpa occupied on TV. Due to this, the show ended immediately after Kokichi rode the elevator, they didn’t even ask Rantaro and Nagito for an opinion. Nagito waited for him outside of the studio, a smile on his face.

“How can you smile, haven’t you seen? They hate him now! This is bad!”

“You don’t know Danganronpa’s audience well enough or you would not say this. Give it a night.” he started to walk away waving a hand. “Give it a night and Kokichi will enter Danganronpa history
as one of the most interesting character ever created. You’ll see.”

Rantaro collapsed on his bed and slept through the night, too tired to follow internet properly. The next morning he remained in bed and browsed as much as humanly possible, inside the vast wide web, searching for clues of the collective impression of this trial. Nagito’s prophecy was on spot. Everyone was talking about Kokichi. Maybe not on the most flattering terms, but still they were going wild with excitement. Rantaro remembered his sister’s reaction and realized he should have seen this coming from a mile away. People were obsessed with a killing game; it was not the prize of the year for the nicest person in the world. It was obvious that a personality so different from the previous ones would be popular.

The popularity poll in the show confirmed it. Rantaro was sitting on his sofa and reading comments once again. Everyone was talking about Kokichi, they were going crazy for new footage. Kokichi had reached his goal in full, whatever that could be. The audience was as addicted as ever. This was really following the path of one of the most successful season ever. Shirogane’s smooth expression said as much. After the popularity poll, Shirogane was about to ask the two of them for an opinion when Nagito interrupted.

“More importantly. I win the bet!” he was smiling broadly. “So I get to do whatever I want, right?”

“Wait… We never actually agreed on the terms! I think this bet is invalid!” Rantaro tried to dodge the bullet.

The audience, both live and not, started to protest against him.

“Now, now! Listen to what I want first!” Rantaro nodded hesitantly. “Hmm, well my initial thought was to make you lick my shoes…” Rantaro’s jaw dropped. “But after thinking about it for a while, I realized that I rather have that done by Hajime, so I changed my mind.”

-Oh lord. Someone! Draw a fanart of this, ASAP-

-Hajime! Where are you, when you’re needed?!-

-Komahina is love, Komahina is life! <3-

Chiaki puffed her cheeks at the comments making the live audience in the studio chuckle.

“So, what I choose is something that you should be familiar with, Big Brother!” Nagito got on his feet pulling out of his pocket a number of colored markers.

Rantaro sat still with an unimpressed expression while Nagito was having a lot of fun drawing silly stuff on his face. He drew a purple star around the left eye and a spiral on his right cheek. After he drew a blue frame around his mouth, he nodded happily and returned to his sofa. The live audience was laughing at him and so were the comments. That night, they only showed Kokichi leaving the elevator and searching for food in the kitchen while the others were fussing over a sick Kaito. The first to leave the trial ground was Shuichi, he had a determinate expression on his face. Rantaro had a bad feeling about this; he knew what he was searching for. The audience protested loudly when the show left them with a terrible cliffhanger, they wanted to see the confrontation between Kokichi and Shuichi. Rantaro was grateful they gave him the opportunity to see it from Ryota first. Leaving the studio, Rantaro asked Nagito why he had chosen this punishment for the bet.

“Because I figure this wouldn’t hit you too hard, being a childish thing and all that, and because I’ve never done something like this in my whole life and I was eager to try!” Nagito had a big happy smile on his face.
Rantaro had no idea what to think of this guy. He was still so incredibly confusing.

The next day, he asked Hinata-san’s permission to see the footage of the night and he sent him the data directly. Once again, in his living room, Rantaro watched the scene unfold. Kokichi was found by Shuichi in the entrance hall, they had a conversation and Kokichi escaped to hide inside the empty room next to the séance room. Kokichi was so mad he almost let the truth slip, Rantaro was feeling really down. It was clear they were both affecting each other even more now, Kokichi was afraid of confronting Shuichi’s judging eyes and Shuichi was determined to extract the truth from him. This was not a happy situation. Rantaro wondered when Monokuma was going to ask Kokichi what prize he wanted. The night was uneventful, Shuichi searched for Kokichi until two in the morning before giving up; meanwhile Kokichi was hiding inside his Lab. The next morning, Monokuma gave the usual prize for completing the class trial alive and they explored the school once again. Shuichi opened the Astronaut Lab and the door to the Survivor Lab, but Monokuma forbade them from entering. The production didn’t want them to see the Survivor Perk just yet. All morning, Shuichi didn’t communicate with the others, he was too focused on Kokichi to really care and Kaito was pouting anyway.

The following day, he accompanied Miu to her interview. The girl chose a very daring dress that left little of her boobs to the imagination and Rantaro had to cover for her multiple times during the interview. The girl was capable of lying, but not to mask her feelings, luckily she was a lot less angry with Gonta and Kokichi now that she could play around with all the machines she wanted. The next day, it was Gonta’s turn. Rantaro accompanied him, but didn’t need to cover for him, the guy was an angel, he just gave a positive opinion about everything and everyone, except the whole concept of the show, but that was to be expected.

The morning he woke up with a message from Hinata-san. He had asked him if he could bring some of his friends to a certain address, he wanted to introduce some of the easier to get along with participants to Seiko. The girl was all alone and Hinata-san wanted her to make some friends. Rantaro chose Kaede, Sonia and Mahiru to accompany him to Seiko’s apartment. Chiaki, Byakuya, Hinata-san and Nagito were waiting for them in front of a complex at the appointed address. It was when they were exchanging greetings that it happened. A girl with short gray hair was spying on them from afar. Hinata-san stared at her for a while with his head tiled, confused, then suddenly he called out to her, making everyone turn to look at her.

“Miaya?”

The girl ran toward them, stopped at some distance and pointed a finger at Nagito.

“What is he doing here?” she asked with an aggressive tone.

“Miaya? Is it really you? Were you living around here?” asked Byakuya, for once his voice was completely normal, without any hints of arrogance.

“No, I spied on you when you brought Seiko here.” she was still staring at Nagito with hard eyes.

“Why did you bring him to her. I don’t want him anywhere near her!”


“I failed to protect her once, it’s not happening again. He is not getting close to her. I can’t understand what you all think you are doing, letting him join you. I heard from Seiko you want to stop Danganronpa. If it’s true then why are you all cooperating with him?”

“Miaya, I don’t get it, Nagito is helping us. What’s wrong with that?” Hinata-san was even more confused.
“You really don’t know who he is? Haven’t you check his background at all? Then you are all very naïve! He is a traitor! He is working for Danganronpa!”

Everyone looked at Nagito and Miaya in turns while they were staring at each other without faltering. Nagito had yet to say a word.

“He is Towa Haiji, the son of the Danganronpa chief!”

Chapter End Notes

Next time on Present Side:
Saihara-chan, let’s keep this as an act only, it’s best for both.
Kokichi was sitting on the bed, clean and dry.

There were no window in the Love Suite, but the clock on the wall said that it was almost eight; Shuichi would arrive soon, if the plan had worked. As soon as he heard his steps down the hallway, he started to spin a pair of handcuffs with his index finger. Shuichi’s eyes were immediately on him.

“Yo, I’m your riding for the night!” Kokichi said seductively winking and running a finger up his thigh.

Shuichi was not impressed.

“Yes, I was right. I hate this place, I’m going back. Bye.”

Kokichi threw away the handcuffs and hurried to him, hugging him from behind. The difference in height was bothering him a little; he wanted to see his face. Instead, he could get on tiptoe and he still was only able to see his shoulder.

“Non, non, don’t leave me!!” he faked some tears. “How can I live without my one and true love!!”

Shuichi flickered him on the forehead. Kokichi let him go with a pout.

“Were you saying these things to Amami-kun as well?”

Wow, he really was jealous, wasn’t he? It was adorable and silly at the same time. He had nothing to be jealous of, he was only joking when he ‘confessed’ to Rantaro. But he was not going to say it, seeing him like this was too funny and endearing.

“Who knows? I’m a liar after all! Maybe I said them to a hundred cute guys!” he placed his hands behind his head.

“That’s more likely, you are the kind of person that says these things just to mess with people.” Shuichi looked mildly annoyed.

Kokichi was a bit confused, was this remarked act necessary? A little bit of jealousy was okay, but there was no need to take it so seriously. This was all a lie anyway.

“The word ‘love’ is overrated anyway! Nowadays it’s used for everything! It doesn’t mean anything anymore!” Kokichi shrugged.

Shuichi stared at him with a displeased expression.

“Do you really think that?”

“Oh, let me guess, you are one of those romantic types that only says ‘I love you’ to people they think they will love for life, right?” he tilted his head.

“What’s that supposed to mean?” he was annoyed now.

“That ‘forever’ doesn’t exist. Crushes in high school or middle school think they will last for life and
it never happens. Life is not so convenient, feelings are not so convenient.”

“So you don’t believe in love at all? You’ll never say ‘I love you’ seriously? You’ll always say it as a joke? Because forever doesn’t exist?” Shuichi was frowning deeply.

Why was he getting so real? Kokichi was an unconventional romantic. He would say ‘I love you’ only as a joke exactly because he was aware that saying it seriously required a deep feeling that Kokichi was not sure he would ever be able to develop for anyone. Kokichi’s definition of love was something of such high standard that it was impossible. Especially for a little piece of shit with trust issue like him. He could not say ‘I love you’ for real, that would be the real lie.

“Pretty much.” he shrugged again. “It’s best to live in the moment and not to worry too much about feelings, you know? Like, an open relationship? It’s okay as long as it’s interesting, then everyone’s on their way, no hard feelings.”

“I would never be able to do something like that. If there are no feelings, then there is no meaning.”

Kokichi was at a loss for words. Shuichi looked offended for some reason. As he was looking at him, Shuichi’s eyes fixed on the Bugvacuum on the floor. Suddenly he reached for it and pressed the switch, activating it. Kokichi tried to ask him what he was doing, but he got interrupted.

“Were you serious?”

“Why are you reacting like that? I don’t get it, why do you even care.” Kokichi let his arms fall.

“What do you mean, ‘why do you even care’, of course I care!” Shuichi was raising his voice a little. “How can I not care!”

“Why? I’m just saying, it doesn’t have anything to do with you.” now Kokichi started to feel guarded again, why was he being scolded?

“It doesn’t…!” Shuichi closed his eyes for a moment. “I care a lot if the person I…” he hesitated again. “like says he doesn’t believe in love, feelings, relationships, anything at all.”

Wait, was this still the act or not? He had turned off the Bugvacuum so, probably not? Was he actually trying to bring up actual feelings again?

“Wait a minute Saihara-chan, there is no need to bring actual feelings into this,” he tried to reason with him, “this is all an act anyway. Keep it light, okay?”

A long silence stretched. Shuichi was staring at him and soon Kokichi was not capable of returning the stare.

“If this is all an act…” Shuichi started slowly. “Then what do you really feel for me?”

Kokichi’s heart tightened, he couldn’t answer that. No answer would be completely honest.

“I like you.” he answered in the end, keeping it vague.

“In what sense,” of course he would not want it to be vague, “as a friend, as a person, as in ‘I have feelings for you’?”

“Then what about you,” he didn’t want to answer, so he threw the ball back where it started, “what do you feel for me?”

“I… I cannot say that I love you, not yet, but I have feelings for you.” he blushed a little, but kept his
stare steady.

“As in… in the act… right?” it was his last desperate attempt.

He hoped Shuichi would get the message. Kokichi was not capable of speaking of real feelings right now, it was too painful. He really hoped Shuichi would stop prodding at bleeding wounds. Silence filled the room again. This time Shuichi’s expression changed a bit, it was as if he was examining him, deciphering him. Kokichi didn’t even want to know what he was reading from this conversation, he just wanted to go back to normal.

“So, they failed the treasure hunt, right? Then-“

“This is not an act for me Kokichi. I honestly like you, I want to be by your side, help you and know more about you.” he said calmly.

Silence again.

“I thought I made myself clear, but I guess this is partially my fault. I never actually said how much the act and reality were separated.” he took a step in Kokichi’s direction. Kokichi had to fight the urge to take a step back. “The whole ‘S-chan’ and ‘Romeo-chan’ and ‘first night of marriage’ is surely part of the act…”

He was getting too close for Kokichi’s liking.

“But me hugging you, wanting to help you, trying to understand you… That’s not an act. I’m worried when you are cold and look sick, something that happens way too often for me not to worry about. I’m happy when you cuddle next to me, when you hug me and when you play with me…”

Now he was right in front of him and Kokichi was forced to look at the ground, too close to actual tears to look at him. It hurt.

“Kokichi, my feelings are not an act, you don’t have to be so scared of me. I don’t want to hurt you.”

He was already doing it. Could he not see that Kokichi was not ready? He was not ready to trust someone. He was not ready to count on someone else’s feelings. He had been already so weakened by all this; he was always feeling tired, cold and faint, like he was really becoming a ghost. After Gonta’s trial, he had been thrown off balance; his mental stability had been lost. He could not even be sure of himself anymore; after all, even now he was still spouting crazy plans from his sick mind. He needed to distance himself from others, not only for his safety but for the other’s as well. Ending Danganronpa was a praiseworthy goal, but honestly, Shuichi should abandon him right now and go back to his old self. All this was going to leave a scar in him and Kokichi was at fault for that, just like with Iruma-chan and Gonta. In this weakened state of mind… how could he make any rational decision?

The truth was… Kokichi would end up relying on Shuichi entirely if this was to keep up. Like, he would give 100% of his heart to him and this would surely break him completely. It was not like he was afraid that Shuichi would hurt him intentionally, Shuichi was a good person, but there was just no way he was capable of accepting Kokichi as a whole. As Shuichi himself said, there were parts of him that he was not willing to accept, and it was the right thing to do. But in this state of mind, so compromised and weak, even a little push could send him in pieces if he were to open his heart entirely to him. This was scary, too scary.

“Saihara-chan, let’s keep this as an act only, it’s best for both of us.”

Shuichi frowned again. He stared at him and Kokichi broke eye contact again. Suddenly he felt
hands tighten on his shoulders. Kokichi’s heart leaped out of his chest and started to dance furiously, mostly out of fear. He had said that he liked Shuichi when he was taking a bit of initiative, but only a bit. Not full-fledged aggression!

“First, my name is Shuichi, it’s about time you stop calling me ‘Saihara-chan’.”

“Ahh, hmm, S-chan, I get that it’s been quite a while since last time we had sex but-“

“Secondly, for the fourth or fifth time, this is not-an-act.”

“But to grab me like this… You’re a little too eager, you didn’t even give me the time to-“

“Kokichi.”

“I would’ve thought you liked foreplay and-“

“Kokichi, were you aware that you tend to blabber a lot when you are nervous?”

“Ah, err…”

“Kokichi, I truly like you, and I know you do too. Please, stop trying to run away from me.”

Chapter End Notes

Next time Somewhere:
He will drag the season to complete boredom forcing the production to use some drastic measure to keep the ball rolling. This is his plan.
Somewhere

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes.

“He is Towa Haiji, the son of the Danganronpa chief!”

They were all frozen in place, not knowing what to do or think.

Nagito was… Danganronpa’s heir?

The guy said nothing either way, neither confirming or denying. He just stared at them with his arms crossed, as if he had nothing to say. Rantaro could not understand if this was because he thought he had nothing to explain or because he was admitting guilt. Suddenly Rantaro felt a little hesitant…

Could they really trust what this girl was saying like this? Was it more believable a girl that showed up unexpectedly or the guy he fought with for days?

“W-wait, what are you saying Miaya, this is crazy, it’s-“ Hinata-san tried to reason with her.

“It’s not crazy! Ask Mitarai! He knew this already! He is a spy, he is selling all you out to his father!” the girl was yelling.

“Nagito… what’s going on…?” Hinata-san was confused; he had no idea what to do.

“No, not ‘Nagito’, tell them! Tell them your real name!” she ordered.

“Yeah, my birth name is Towa Haiji… what of it?”

A shocked silence fell on them, while the girl looked triumphant. Was he really a traitor? He was Danganronpa’s heir, right? But then what was all of this? What had been all the ‘lessons’ he gave him. What had been all the appearances on the show? Why was he antagonizing Shirogane? Camouflage? Was it really necessary? What about his obsession with ending Danganronpa? Was that just a lie? And what about the time in the Neo World Program, why did he try to end the season earlier? And why had he been in the virtual world in the first place?

No, something didn’t make sense.

“Wait a minute! Maybe he is his son… but I don’t think that he is a traitor!” Rantaro spoke up. “He helped us way too much! It doesn’t make sense!”

“Yeah, I don’t think he is a traitor either.” said Chiaki in her usual calm tone.

“I don’t know who you two are, but… I don’t care, he will not get any closer to Seiko!” this looked like what she cared about the most.

“It’s nice to see that I can still count on my best friend to believe me, right Hajime?” Nagito said making Hajime sweat a little. “Thanks Rantaro, I knew I could count on you.” he nodded in his direction. “Chiaki, thanks to you too, tell Seiko I wish her the best of luck, okay?” with that he walked away.

After Nagito disappeared behind the corner, Chiaki asked the girl if she wanted to see Seiko as well, but she refused, looking somewhat panicked. Was this girl okay? Maybe she needed therapy too…

Seiko’s apartment was quite small, but comfortable. It was decorated with warm colors and pillows
and blankets were everywhere making people immediately feel warm and soft inside. The girl was still looked a bit on edge, especially with strangers, but she looked very friendly and welcoming too. She had a soft, delicate voice that was difficult to hear and she was wearing gloves, as if she was maybe afraid of getting dirty or maybe hurt. Or maybe, she had just a very chilly body, it was difficult to tell. They didn’t talk about the new season while having the tea she prepared, which was surprisingly good, despite her describing it as very healthy. It seemed they wanted to keep her out of the fight and it was understandable, she still needed time to recover, it was not the right moment to throw her into a difficult situation.

That night, Rantaro thought about Nagito a lot and the more he thought about him, the more he was certain. He wasn’t a traitor. He had no idea of what his past was, but if he had been inside a fictional killing game, maybe his relationship with his father was not so great after all. He was going to speak with Ryota and ask him what was going on, since the girl mentioned him. When he arrived at Ryota’s office the next morning, the guy looked even more tired, he was becoming a full fledged zombie. He was about to show him the new footage immediately after their greetings, but Rantaro stopped him. They could talk about this another time, since it would most likely just be the exploration of the new areas.

“No, that’s not why I’m here. I actually wanted to ask you…”

“Ah, this is about Nagito, I see.” for the first time in a while, Ryota stopped writing code and fully faced him. “Hajime and Chiaki were here earlier to ask the same thing. I… yes his real name is Towa Haiji but that doesn’t mean anything.”

“Why do you know these things about him? Do you get personal information about all the participants?” Rantaro asked.

“No, that’s not it… I knew Haiji, or Nagito, by the way, he’d rather be called Nagito, from way before his participation. It’s difficult to explain it all, but… Nagito is an extramarital son; the chief had him with a lover during his marriage. Originally, he didn’t have his last name and he never even knew his father, he was raised by his mother all alone, almost in secret. When he got older, his mother found a man she wanted to marry and she sent him away, she only gave him the address of his father’s house and told him to go and ‘beg’ there. Nagito did it and that’s the first time he met with the chief. In the meantime, he had had another child, a daughter called Towa Monaca, from her wife, but they had divorced a year ago. The chief took Nagito in, but only because he was scared that Nagito would try to sully his reputation by telling everyone who he really was. He got the last name and a room but he was badly seen by everyone. His little sister, in particular, was shocked and disgusted knowing his father had had her step-brother with a lover.”

Why was Rantaro certain that the story could only go bad from there?

“This is when he met with me. He started poking around the headquarter, curious about the whole affair. He’ll never be the heir, his father already wrote in his will that Towa Monaca-san will be the next chief, so he figured he could just snoop around as he pleased. Nagito was a ‘normal’ person before, I guess you can call it that, so when he discovered about the drastic changes in memories, the manipulations and all the other shady things the corporation does he reacted much earlier than I did. He was the first one that tried to sway my opinion; he was the first one to try to change the brand. He got here way earlier than both Chiaki and Hajime. But at that time I was still a newbie around here and enamored with the brand, so his attempts at persuasion only scared me. When Nagito tried to talk to the chief about all this, he reacted even worse. I’ll tell you this: Nagito never got into the Neo World Program of his own free will.”

“You mean… His father forced him?!” Rantaro was disgusted by that possibility.
“Inside the Neo World Program you forget everything about your old personality. Along with the fact that most of you old memories is deleted or modified. The chief ordered us to eliminate every trace of his relationship with him from his mind. He was still scared that Nagito would go to the press and sully his reputation, not to mention damaging the brand. To erase everything from his mind apparently looked like the best solution. When Nagito discovered this, he wrote a diary in a hurry and gave it to me. I was the one closer to his age, so he chose to trust me of all the people. He gave me the diary, asking me to safe keeping it until he was capable of leaving the program. And… that’s what happened. After he left the program, I gave him the diary back. Amami-san, he doesn’t want to betray anyone, no matter what Gekkogahara-san may say, he is the one with the strongest motivation to destroy the brand.”

“I see… I should have seen this coming from a mile away…” Rantaro sighed. “How does she know about this?”

“That was my mistake… She asked me for some details when she had just left the program and I naively thought she would not take this information at heart. I kept it a secret after realizing that this was something only Nagito had the right to say, but it was too late. I have been an idiot, but she looked very lost and scared and after that season, I felt compelled to answer all of her questions. She probably decided that everything was Nagito’s fault or something since he is his son. Really, that was my mistake. She even ran away after that…”

Ryota was still clearly beating himself over that mistake.

“And apparently not telling this to Hajime was yet another mistake…” Ryota looked really bad. “Now they are on bad terms because of me, am I right?”

“They are not on bad terms, don’t worry, we were only taken by surprise, I’m sure everything will be resolved soon. Thank you for telling me the whole story… Ryota.”

The guy looked interested by the use of the first name.

“Can I call you Rantaro…?” he asked a bit shyly.

“Sure! We’re friends right?” he smiled and patted him on the shoulder. “Don’t overwork yourself Ryota, get some sleep! Bye!”

Rantaro left the office and tried to go to Hinata-san’s when he heard two familiar voices down the corridor. He hid behind the corner.

“-let me speak, I was just surprised, I wasn’t doubting you!” Hinata-san’s voice.

“It doesn’t matter! I already told you, I don’t care. It’s already clear that you forgot all about me in favor of having a cute girlfriend and a comfortable apartment. You moved on with your life and I’m not included anymore. That’s all there is to it.” Nagito’s voice.

“No, I told you that’s not it! I was waiting for you, of course, I looked at you everyday, to make sure you were okay! I’ve not forgotten anything! And the thing with Chiaki… Nagito, this is your own misunderstanding… I never promised you anything. We weren’t a couple, you just remember it wrong.”

“Look, I may have the excuse of having my memories toyed with all over again, but you don’t. I’m sure there was something between us, but it doesn’t matter anymore, you do you. Just allow me to be bitter about the fact that you moved on completely without me. Am I allowed that much?”

“Nagito… for real, that’s not true, I was waiting for you. I haven’t abandoned you! I don’t know
“You don’t owe me anything, and this doesn’t really matter, I already told you. I’m human garbage. I’m my mother’s garbage, my father’s garbage, my sister’s garbage and now I’m your garbage as well. It’s fine. At least I met a nice person, I think I’ll hang out with Rantaro from now and I’ll buy his body pillow next.”

Rantaro grimaced, but then sighed.

“Nagito…!” Hinata-san’s pleading tone went to waste.

Nagito turned the corner and bumped into Rantaro who was too deep in thought to notice his cue to leave. Nagito looked at him, shrugged and then waved a hand at him with a smile, walking away. Hinata-san in the meantime had reached the corner as well and watched him walk away with a sad expression.

“Please, be nice to him.” he told him with resignation.

“You don’t have to tell me.” he answered with a bit of irritation walking away himself.

The next morning he was awakened by the doorbell, Rantaro had a pretty good idea who that may have been.

“Good morning Rantaro! I brought footage and popcorn!” Nagito.

“Yeah, good morning. First, I want to say that I have a girlfriend.” he said with a sigh.

“Oh, I know that.” he said nonchalantly inviting himself in. “At least you got her before you got me, it’s already something new! Don’t worry, I’m not jealous.”

Rantaro sighed again, closing the door. They sat on the sofa together and looked at the footage of the whole week. Kokichi was hidden inside his Lab most of the time; he spied on the other participants from the inside. Shuichi opened the door to Kaito’s Lab and the one to Rantaro’s Lab, but Monokuma forbid them from entering. Nagito made him notice that the Lab still existed. Shirogane wanted to use Rantaro’s Perk to end the season. Rantaro remembered the message inside and felt frustration, if only he could have heard it earlier! He had left a hint about his need to help Kokichi in there. He didn’t want Shirogane to use it to help her season.

Nagito fast-forwarded the next few hours, Shuichi was searching around the school, but he could not find anything, not until Shirogane hinted to him about the hanger in the garden. Shuichi went with her to explore the hanger, but the footage followed Kokichi instead, he left the Lab and wrote something on the stone on the garden: ‘This world is mine, Kokichi Ouma’. Nagito paused the video.

“What do you think he is doing?” he asked him.

Rantaro pondered for a bit.

“He is trying to pose as the mastermind?” he tried.

“Yes, that’s probably it. Now, keep this information in mind for later.”

They observed him panic while Shuichi almost squashed Kiibo under the press. Rantaro smiled, he was still very attached to Shuichi, wasn’t he? Then suddenly Himiko called them back to the dining room and Shirogane told them about Kokichi’s message. Nagito elbowed him, Rantaro observed
Kokichi’s expression at this. His expression changed only so much but Rantaro could sense that he was satisfied.

“He understood that Shirogane is the mastermind.” Nagito said with confidence.

“Will he end the season now?”

“No way, if I’m reading this correctly, his objective is to make the season as long as possible. He wants to bore the public by keeping everyone and Shirogane at bay by assuming the identity of the mastermind. If I’m right, the prize he wants will be something that ‘proves’ that he is the mastermind. He will drag out the season to complete boredom, forcing the production to use some drastic measure to keep the ball rolling. This is his plan.”

“Well, this is really bad isn’t it?” Rantaro was getting even more worried. “His health is in danger already; he can’t stay there more than 6 weeks!”

“Then we need to be as boring as possible during the show as well, we need to help him a bit.”

Chapter End Notes

Next time on Present Side:
This is your fault, you were the one to put this on this terms!

Is Rantaro/Nagito One Side an available ship to chose?
No no, I'm just joking xD Nagito is not being for real, he is just trying for the jealousy technique xD
Not that it will ever work but...
Anyway, that scene is actually pretty important. Nagito feels like everyone moved on except for him, who remained to fight inside the Neo World Program all alone. He felt abandoned and Hajime visiting him when he was in the pod gives him little to no comfort.
It's not something you can process rationally, even if you know that there was really no other choice.
“Stop trying to run away from me.”

A knot was squeezing in Kokichi’s throat. He could only shake his head repeatedly.

“Don’t lie, I know I’m right. If you are not lying, then look me in the eyes and tell me you don’t have any feelings for me at all.” he was still staring right at him.

Kokichi closed his eyes and shook his head even stronger. This was bad, if this was to keep up… But he was not capable of speaking right now, his throat was not cooperating. Should he push him away? But he didn’t want to…

Shuichi sighed and dropped his head on Kokichi’s right shoulder, his hands loosened a bit. Kokichi froze.

“Sometimes, I wish I was more like Kaito, he would know what to do right now…” he whispered into his shoulder.

“I’d rather you not being like Kaito, I hate him.” he tried to squeeze out, but it didn’t come out very well.

“You don’t like him, but you don’t hate him either.” Shuichi shook his head a little, Kokichi felt a strand of hair tickling his neck, sending a chill down his spine. “I don’t know what to do… I don’t know how to make you understand, I don’t know how to get to you, I don’t know how to help you, I don’t know how to make it better, I don’t know how to not make you feel afraid, I don’t know how I should treat you, I don’t know. I wish I was good with these things, but I’m not, I don’t know what to do. I just want you to accept me and to be happy.”

Shuichi wrapped his arms around him and pulled him into a tight hug. Kokichi was still frozen.

He had to take a decision, and he had to take it now.

“I’m sorry…” it was almost involuntary, his voice really faint.

“For what?” Shuichi asked, still from his shoulder.

“Everything.” he felt tears forming in his eyes.

“Hm.” he nodded on his shoulder. “I’m sorry for everything too.”

“You have nothing to apologize for.” Kokichi slowly raised his arms, they were trembling a bit.

“No, I’m sorry for not being a better person.” he could head tears in Shuichi’s voice.

“Stupid…” Kokichi hugged him back as hard as he could.

“You too.”

Kokichi started to cry softly, as silently as he could and remaining as still as possible. This was not the right moment to break into little pieces; he had to stay strong, for Shuichi’s sake. Shuichi noticed
nonetheless and stroked him gently on the back for a long time.

When they separated, Kokichi was drained of tears and energy, he sat down on the bed sighing and wiping his face. He still could not believe he had actually cried like that. Where had his ability to lie gone to? Shuichi disappeared to the bathroom for a moment and returned with a glass of water for him, which he accepted without a word. Shuichi moved his bangs from his eyes and caressed his forehead and right cheek, shyly sitting next to him. Kokichi sighed again after finishing the glass. Shuichi took it from his hands and place it on the floor.

“You are cold, as usual. Go under the covers.” said Shuichi gently.

“Trying to slip into my bed as usual?” he tried to smile but it came off weakly.

“Yes, that’s exactly it. So help me.” Shuichi didn’t bother correcting him.

Kokichi took off his shoes, crawled under the sheets and didn’t even give Shuichi the chance to escape. He grabbed him by the arm and dragged him next to him.

“Keep me warm, like a good boyfriend.”

Shuichi shifted positions, covered them both and hugged him without hesitation. Kokichi immediately pressed his face to his chest. After crying like a little kid, his pride was already burned, who cared anymore.

“You know, you still haven’t answered me. Do you have feelings for me or not? I won’t allow you to call me boyfriend anymore if it’s a lie.” Shuichi broke the hug and grabbed him by the shoulders again, breaking the contact and forcing Kokichi to look at him again.

“Sheesh, and people say it’s me who’s stubborn…” Kokichi pouted. “I have feelings for you, just as Mister Detective said.”

Shuichi smiled a little and nodded.

“Okay, then call me boyfriend. But for real. Not for the act. I mean, even outside of… the show, I’m still your boyfriend. Got it?” he moved his bangs away again.

Kokichi blushed, looking away. Shuichi really was not okay in the head. With all the fishes in the sea, why did he have to waste his time on a defective product like Kokichi? He could maybe understand it inside the killing game. After all, Kokichi was the last cute guy left. If Shuichi had ever once fantasized about Momota Kaito, Kokichi was seriously going to break up with him, like here and now, the plan could be damned. So yeah, he had limited choices, but outside? Hell, Rantaro was more suited for Shuichi than him. No, almost anyone was more suited than him. Kokichi was ready to lose against Fuyuhiko, Gundham and even Kazuichi or Nagito! Probably even Byakuya! The only person Kokichi was not willing to lose against was Teruteru, there; he had to draw the line.

Well, assuming he was not just going to run back to Akamatsu-chan like a lost puppy. That possibility was the most likely.

“Really, even outside? Aren’t you going back to your girlfriend?” Kokichi had no idea what demon possessed him to say that out loud.

“Who?” Shuichi was seriously surprised.

“You know… That bright sun that rolled a shot put ball into a vent to kill people… That one.”
Kokichi wanted to cringe at his own sarcasm. Now Shuichi really was going to run back to her.

“Pfft-!” Shuichi muffled a laugh with his hand. “Akamatsu-san? My girlfriend? Are you sure, you don’t have a fever Kokichi? I don’t even like girls that way!”

“Well you never know… I’m sure you are a virgin, so you never tried, so maybe if you tried, you would discover that maybe you actually do, or maybe you—”

“I already mentioned that you blabber a lot when you are nervous, right? And who are you to say I’m a virgin by the way?”

“Eh, you are not? I don’t believe you.” not even a little bit.

“H-hm, well, no, maybe I am…” he blushed, caught in his own trap. “But… you know…”

Shuichi was trying to say something, but he was failing miserably. He kept looking at him, then away and then at him again, still red and flustered. Kokichi had a pretty clear idea of what he was thinking. He wanted to kiss him, didn’t he? Kokichi’s heart sped up, every trace of cold disappearing from his body. At least something good the programmers were still doing. Even if Kokichi was not sure he wanted to enter into the mental process of figuring out how some mechanics were reproduced in the Neo World Program. Were the programmers the one to simulate the physical process during… no, he was not going to go there.

Still, he had to take a decision. Should he try to kiss him first? But, that would put Kokichi at a disadvantage, not to mention he would risk getting refused… Should he let Shuichi decide? But, at the same time, he was the one to move things forward all the time, maybe he deserved Kokichi taking the initiative for once.

He had to risk it… If Shuichi was going to refuse him, he could survive this, probably. It just meant that his feelings were actually platonic, even if he had offered to kiss him once already… Maybe? That was an offering, right? He had permission to try, right? They were cuddling all the time, so yes, right?

Kokichi took all his courage into his hand, which was not much, and placed it on Shuichi’s exposed cheek. He stilled under him, staring at him right in the eyes. Kokichi forced himself to go through with it and not to just stop there, as he was really tempted to. He slowly inched closer to his face until their noses were almost touching. He gave him all the time in the world to back away from him, but Shuichi didn’t move. Taking a breath, Kokichi closed the gap between them and placed his lips gently on Shuichi’s. They didn’t move, too tense to do anything. Kokichi quickly broke contact, his heart beating erratically with fear of having screwed up big time. He removed his hand and tried to create as big a distance as he could.

“See? It’s best if you do this with a girl, I’m not—“

“Wait, wait a minute!” he grabbed his wrist before he could escape. “I-I’m not convinced! Again!”

Kokichi wanted to die from embarrassment. Without stopping to think too much, he just grabbed his face again, more rudely than before, and placed his lips on his again. Shuichi immediately placed a hand behind his neck to keep him in place and a hand on his back to pull him closer. Kokichi grabbed the front of his jacket with his free hand as revenge. Feeling stupidly vengeful, he opened his lips a bit and took Shuichi’s lower lip with his teeth, biting him just a tiny bit, enough to make him jolt. Kokichi broke the contact again, now that Shuichi had lost his grip on his neck. Kokichi stared at him with a defiant expression, why he was feeling challenged in his pride, he had no idea. He was going to roll with it anyway. Shuichi was as red as he could be and his hair was a little
ruffled, Kokichi was sure he was no better himself, but he didn’t care one bit. *He was the one in charge here!*

“T-that was already a bit better… H-hmm, s-so…”

“Please stop, you are cringy!” Kokichi interrupted him.

“This is your fault, you were the one to put this into this terms! Can’t you just kiss me normally!?” Shuichi defended himself admiringly.

“Of course I can!” irrationality had already filled his brain, there was no turning back.

Kokichi immediately bit him again, but this time Shuichi didn’t lose focus and still grabbed him, pulling him closer. Kokichi let go his lip to try something different, he was not sure of what yet, when Shuichi started to move his lips on his quickly. All the thoughts flew out of the non-existent window. Slowly the kiss became more gentle and deep, they were still inexperienced and clumsy, but now the right feeling was behind it. All thoughts about embarrassment, revenge, inadequacy, lack of self-esteem and fear were dissolved into a warm puddle. They had both discarded all pretenses and were actually living the moment. Feeling the other closer and enjoying the warmth.

When they broke the kiss to get some air, they stared at each other, for once without having any complicated feelings behind it. Just looking at the other. Shuichi stroke Kokichi’s hair back gently and nuzzled him. Kokichi hugged Shuichi’s back and hid his face on his neck. Feeling safe, like he had not felt in a very long time, if ever.

For once, they were not the Detective and the Supreme Leader.

They were Shuichi and Kokichi.

Chapter End Notes

Next time Somewhere:
I think we should leave this to boy Detective.

I'm not available after this one, I won't answer your comments because I'm going to hide under a rock. Sayonara.
(No, I'm joking I'll answer xD )
Six weeks was the time limit.

But Kokichi was not aware of it. Rantaro was in a dire need to inform him somehow, but he could not. The only thing he could do was go over the new footage with Nagito again. They had not gone to the studio in almost a week and people were starting to complain. Shirogane was not capable of making the show interesting all by herself, not now that the audience was used to their presence. Nagito told Rantaro not to worry. Right now, the priority was to remain standby, ready to help Kokichi if there was a need to. The footage showed Kokichi trapping Shuichi inside Ryoma’s shower room and their discussion. Rantaro almost felt pity for them, they had such a bad communication overall and now it was even worst. Just when they had almost found some kind of common ground to communicate, they had ended up losing even more progress.

Kokichi somehow convinced Shuichi to cooperate with him. The simple fact that the boy was willing to give Kokichi a second chance was already astonishing. The boy Detective was fairly distant from people in general, like Kokichi, he never actually actively tried to deepen bonds with the other participants. He had accepted Kaito’s friendship and Maki’s presence, but the only person he had actually extended a hand to was Kokichi. That fact alone was already half a miracle, now he was showing even more forgiveness than Rantaro ever expected. If he had to be honest, if he had been in Shuichi’s shoes, he would not have forgiven Kokichi. He remembered the feeling of not wanting to deal with Nagito after Byakuya’s murder. He had still considered him a brother, but that didn’t stop him from being mad at him. Shuichi was either naïve, too forgiving or… more attached to Kokichi than he cared to admit, probably even to himself. Rantaro’s stomach was hurting just thinking how big of a waste this was. Kokichi was not going to find another person like him. Not inside a killing game and definitely not outside. His reputation was too compromised; Shuichi was the only person that would really look at Kokichi, and not at the Supreme Leader.

Their conversation confirmed Nagito’s suspicion and gave them some more details about what he was trying to go for. Kokichi was trying to show them the ‘view of the outside world’ and probably present himself as the mastermind. They observe the two separating and Kokichi stood him up. He abandoned the Electrohammers in the entrance and went back into hiding without meeting him again.

Rantaro could not sleep well. Kokichi was going to break Shuichi’s trust once again. There was no way their relationship was salvageable after that. Maybe in the real world they would be able to talk things through… or maybe not. No matter what Kokichi’s motivation was, Shuichi had been hurt too many times already by him. They were done for. The thought almost made him cry with anguish for Leader’s cruel fate.

The next day, they all met inside Ryota’s office, he had called them because Kokichi’s wanted prize had finally been revealed. He had asked Monokuma earlier during the night. The staff was discussing his request furiously on the top floor and Hinata-san and Byakuya were there too, trying to push them toward the idea of granting Kokichi’s wish. Kokichi had asked to have the Exisals for 24 hours. So, that was how he intended to prove he was the mastermind. His plan was pretty solid.

Rantaro would have felt better if he could keep the Exisals forever, to protect him, but Kokichi was smart, he knew he had no chance of getting something so valuable. He put a time limit to his request intentionally, imagining the reaction the staff would have at his request. Was 24 hours enough to
carry out his plan? No, probably not. He had to compromise. What he was going to do after he had convinced them all that he was the mastermind was still a mystery.

They were incapable of staying still as Kokichi’s request was accepted and all the participants, thanks to Shuichi, started to make their way to the other end of the tunnel. They opened the door and Kokichi started his charade. It took them forever. It was already very late at night when they could listen to the whole conversation, even though it was fast-forwarded to normal speed by Ryota. They returned to the complex with heavy hearts. The effect of Kokichi’s plan would not be seen before the next morning. When he saw it, Rantaro almost wanted to laugh; Kokichi used the setting of V2 for his biggest lie.

“You were my test subjects.”

The result of his plan was something no one, not even Nagito could predict. Shuichi stood up to him and forced him to retreat.

Kokichi had taken Kaito as a hostage and fled. Rantaro had imagined that Shuichi was not going to react positively to Kokichi’s new betrayal, but he did not expect him to react so strongly! The boy looked beyond furious! He even used his own friend against Kokichi, telling him to kill Kaito to prove he was the mastermind. Nagito had fallen into a pensive silence, staring at Kokichi who was almost outside of the tunnel. He was surely trying to figure out his next move. Personally, Rantaro doubted Kokichi even had a next move. He looked completely out of balance, truth to be told.

Rantaro left Ryota’s office to get some fresh air. Kaede followed him. The girl joined hands with him as they both sat in the little garden on the back of the headquarters. Sitting in silence, they could hear the staff run around the building shouting orders even from outside. The whole production was in complete chaos. They had not been able to predict Kokichi’s move and even less Shuichi’s move. The programmers were all being called back to work overtime, to deal with any possible trouble that may arise. The last time the season deviated so far off the script, a girl died. If nothing else, surely Kokichi had been able to give an honest scare to them. Rantaro guessed it was already something.

“It was a mistake to rely on Shuichi for the hammers.” said Kaede suddenly.

“What? What do you mean? Because he was even angrier?”

“No, I mean, yes, but not only because of that. I told you that Shuichi has a strong spirit behind his weak appearance. Remember how much he was affected by my crime? This is just the same, he had tried his absolute best to create a solid bond with Kokichi, but he just broke it again and again. It was obvious from the beginning that Shuichi would feel betrayed by him, and the betrayal became anger. Shuichi is moving forward out of pure anger right now. He forgot reason somewhere along the line. Can’t say I blame him though. I would react the same way if it was you who betrayed me like that.” she sent him a smirk. “Kokichi made a mistake by trying to rely on Shuichi for this last mission. Shuichi honestly tried to trust him again and this pushed him over the edge. But, on the other hand, I can see why Kokichi chose to ask for Shuichi’s help. It’s because… he trusts him. He could have given the hammers to anyone, Kiibo, Himiko, it would have been a far better and a more rational decision… but no, he chose the person he trusted. Kokichi is only a human in the end. He fell for the primordial instinct to get closer to the person he liked the most for one last time. Can’t blame him either. This is most tragic. Of course, I’m sad his plan failed but… I’m way sadder because those two are hurting each other without wanting to.”

She was right. Of course, she was right. Rantaro didn’t think much of it, but there was a reason Kokichi chose to give the hammers to Shuichi. Of course, rationally this was a big mistake. Kokichi had chosen with the heart.
“Let’s go back, we need to know what he will do now. We have a responsibility to be there and help him if we can.” Kaede got up and tugged his hand.

They made their way back to Ryota’s office where they found Nagito and Byakuya having a heated discussion.

“No way! Komaeda, this is crazy! You can’t do something like this!”

“Hey, what’s going on?” Rantaro interrupted them.

“This one,” Byakuya pointed at Nagito, “wants us to implant a new memory inside Ouma’s head!”

“What?! Why do you want to do something like this Nagito?!” Rantaro stared right at him.

“I don’t want to add anything crazy, calm down. I just want him to know of a possibility that’s all! For this reason, I need everyone to cooperate! Byakuya, you need to distract the one in charge of implantation, so that Ryota can hack into the system and add the information and in the meantime, we need to inform Hajime. After we’ve done that, we need to wait and see if he will accept my suggestion, if he does, we need to act as late as possible, we can’t risk the other programmers to notice my personal addition in the world.”

“I’m not following…” Rantaro was completely lost.

“Now it’s not the time to talk. Byakuya, go, the sooner we do this the better!” Nagito ordered him. Byakuya left the room with an annoyed expression.

“Wait, I don’t even know for certain that I can hack into the Implanter Admin terminal! It’s the most important position!” Ryota protested, panicked.

“If you can’t it just means that we have to make the Admin leave his position so you can use his terminal directly.” Nagito just brushed off his protests.

“Do you intend to add a flashback light or something?” Rantaro asked him, trying to get a reading on the situation.

“No, of course not, Kokichi would never use it. The Neo World Program can add whatever in their memories at any moment, the flashback light is just flavor. Right now, Kokichi’s mind refuses any more implants, but just adding a little information will probably work.”

“This is crazy, so crazy…” Ryota was biting his thumb.

It was crazy. They had to join efforts and use both Hinata-san and Chiaki to convince the Admin to leave his office for a moment and Ryota worked on the Admin’s terminal as if he was being possessed. As soon as he finished working, he just collapsed on the ground. Nekomaru had to carry him back to his office princess style, while Ibuki was making a lot of ridiculous comments about boy love. The guy regained consciousness only later in the evening, he was not actually sick, just sleep deprived. The stress had been too much to handle. Nagito immediately started to order him around again, ignoring Rantaro when he elbowed him in the side.

“Now, Kokichi took the idea, we need to be ready, you have to add the item in the Lab.”

“I don’t even know what you want me to add! You just went ahead and ordered me to write something about a weapon for mass murder, I didn’t understand anything at all!”

“It’s easy, it’s the same string of code from the last season. Kokichi will understand the rest. I’m sure
you still have the string of code from my murder, right?"

Ryota stared at him, confused. Slowly understanding filled his features.

“You are crazy, this is crazy. They are going to send me to jail for this.”

“Nah, they won’t, they are just going to fire you.” Nagito answered with total nonchalance.

Ryota sat in front of his terminal again and stared intently at the monitors, waiting for the right moment, Nagito joined him. Rantaro tried to ask them what the hell was going on because he was completely lost, but Nagito just answered ‘if it works you’ll see’. A mass murder weapon? In Nagito’s murder? Suddenly he found the answer and he face-palmed. This was one of Nagito’s plans, all right.

Nagito’s plan failed.

Shuichi, alone, entered the hanger where Kokichi was hiding and slapped him. Nagito sighed dramatically.

“It’s no use. This plan will not work if the majority of them are not there. Kokichi lost. We are done. Ryota, delete it immediately. If they have not caught your meddling yet, it’s best if they never do.” he scratched his head and left the office without saying anything else.

Kokichi and Shuichi started talking. With the distortion of time, it was impossible to understand what they were saying. Ryota deleted a string of code and sighed dropping his head on his arms, on the desk.

“You can all go now,” he said from that position, his voice a little muffled, “I’ll call you if anything important happens, but I’m sure they will just talk all night.” then he added a bit more softly. “I’m going to have a heart attack at this rate…”

They all left feeling completely drained. These last few days had been long and stressful. Rantaro tried to sleep, but his mind was keeping replaying the scene of the day. He was relieved that Kokichi didn’t resort to Nagito’s plan but that didn’t mean it was a good thing. Now Kokichi was lost, he had no plan to follow; everything he worked toward had vanished. He was surely feeling depressed over Miu’s and Gonta’s useless sacrifices. Not to mention that now Kokichi had only 5 weeks and two days to act. This was actually very bad.

The next morning, they were all gathered inside Ryota’s office once again without having actually set a time. They were all just so eager to know what happened in the hanger, especially since Ryota didn’t call. If he didn’t contact them, that probably meant that Kokichi was still alive and mostly safe. Without wasting any time, Ryota showed them Kokichi’s and Shuichi’s conversation, they saw Leader give up entirely on his plan and agree to talk with Shuichi. Then he collected all the bombs. If he noticed that the item Nagito had added had disappeared, he didn’t mention it or look surprised at all. They left the hangar together and went inside Kokichi’s Lab. Right at that moment, Kokichi and Shuichi were talking. They could only read a transcription of their conversation, Kokichi was smart, and so he neutralized the cameras to keep the audience away using the Bugvacuum. Without these, Ryota was only seeing them as code, the others weren’t seeing anything at all, since they couldn’t decipher the code. Kokichi was telling Shuichi all about the TV show, he was only avoiding mentioning the Neo World Program for obvious reasons. Monokuma let him stay after he revealed that he remembered the show, but there was no way to tell what they would do if he said anything about the Neo World Program out loud. They surely didn’t want them to act completely out of control. Nagito raised his hands.
“All right I give up. I have no idea what he is doing now. He probably doesn’t have a plan. If he has one, I can’t see what it is. I give up.” he shook his head. “We can just disconnect him at this point. If anything, the audience won’t like him dying right now, it would be very disappointing if all that build up led to nothing. I think this is the best we can hope for right now.”

“No! We don’t know that yet!” Rantaro was the one opposed this time. “Unless his health is in serious danger, I think we need to let him have another chance! This is the first time he’s actually cooperating with someone! At the very least, I want him to try and open up a little before coming back to the real world!”

“I agree.” said Sonia with a light bow.

“I agree as well.” Fuyuhiko crossed his arms with a frown. “I think we should leave this to boy Detective.”

Chapter End Notes

Next time on Present Side:
Are you a cute boy? Are you tricking me making me believe you are a cute boy?
Kokichi woke up with a chill.

He shifted position, trying to get closer to Shuichi to feel his warmth. Once again he didn’t remember falling asleep at all. When had he fallen asleep? After the kiss? Shuichi must have thought he had been very bored to fall asleep immediately after their first kiss. He didn’t want him to think that. Shuichi was petting his hair. It seems that he liked to do that a lot.

“You like my hair don’t you?” he asked, his voice thick with sleep.

“Yes.” he answered immediately, Kokichi open his eyes and looked at him. He looked content and relaxed. “It’s fluffy and soft and I like the color a lot, it’s very special.” he raised a strand, making the light of the room shine on it. “See? It gets lighter the more light you shine on it.”

“You know…” Kokichi decided to spoil his good mood a little. When people were getting all fluffy on him, he had the urge to spoil all the fun. “Maybe my hair is only like this in the show. Maybe outside, my hair is simply black.”

“That would be fine. I’m not going to pout over that. And I’m very plain, so really-“

“No, no. Plain is forbidden in my vocabulary. Forever.”

“All right…” he chuckled a little. “Anyway. I’m probably very uninteresting myself, so really, if you don’t have purple hair or eyes it’s no big deal.”

“I hope you are not fat. Are you fat? I like cute boys. Are you a cute boy? Are you tricking me, making me believe you’re a cute boy?” he asked with a raised eyebrow.

“How am I supposed to know? I’m not tricking you, that’s for sure, I don’t remember myself.” after a while, he added. “Would you really not like me if I were fat?”

“Hmm…” he faked a pensive look. “I guess I’d like you even if you are fat. But I have a reputation to keep! I’ve already said many times I’m only accepting cute boys! So, if you are fat, you better start exercising ASAP.”

“All right, I’m sure Kaito will agree with that as well.” Shuichi smiled.

“Why did you have to remind me of his existence?” Kokichi pouted. He decided to change the subject. “What time it is? How long did I sleep?”

“It’s only midnight or so, you slept for four hours at best. You should sleep more.” Shuichi moved his bangs out of his eyes again.

He really liked his hair.

“More than sleep, I would like to eat. I have not eaten anything since morning.” Kokichi answered absently, he was not really complaining, it was his own fault, he should have brought more food.

“Oh.” Shuichi looked really disappointed. “I’m sorry, I have not thought about that, I should have brought something. You really need to eat more. You’re looking worse every day. I have no idea
what’s happening to you, but I don’t like it.”

“You realize that eating doesn’t help, right?” he could not say that eating inside the virtual world was not going to help his real body.

That was probably the problem, not this virtual body.

“I…” it looked like Shuichi had reached that conclusion only then.

Shuichi was probably starting to worry about his real body now. Kokichi didn’t want him to. This worry could be a problem to the plan. Kokichi had reached the conclusion that his ‘malfunctioning’ was caused by his real body’s health deteriorating. Surely, he had been connected to the machine for too long. However, he was refusing to speed up things just because he was starting to worry about his real body. He never felt as complete and satisfied as he was feeling now, he never wanted this to end. He was aware that this had to end, sooner than later, but he had no idea of the actual situation in the real world. What if he had to separate from Shuichi forever in the real world?

He didn’t want to wake up, the dream was just getting good.

“Kokichi… You’re going to be all right… Right?” Shuichi was very worried now.

“Of course, Saihara-chan! I’m immortal!” he smiled widely.

Shuichi hugged Kokichi tightly.

“You better be, you hear me?” he said in his ear.

Kokichi broke the hug and kissed him on the forehead.

After the moment of sweetness ended, Kokichi realized he could hear the Bugvacuum. He remembered that Shuichi had activated it after he arrived and never turned it off. This was no good, inside the Love Hotel they were supposed to be always visible, even while having sex.

“Hey, Saihara-chan, go and deactivate the Bugvacuum please.”

“Okay, but as I said a lot of times, I’m Shuichi.”

He got up and switched the machine off, returning to the bed immediately after.

“Good, I don’t know how they are going to explain this lack of footage, but it’s their problem. We better not play around too much though, they would do something to stop us if we annoy them too much.”

“Call me Shuichi.” he insisted after Kokichi ignored his comment on purpose.

Kokichi grabbed Shuichi’s jacket, feeling shy. He remembered calling his friends by their first names without too much trouble, but that was way before they modified his memory, now it was embarrassing using first names. He wasn’t sure if he could call even Rantaro like that, let alone Shuichi, the boy he had feelings for. But he knew he had to, it was only right.

“…Shuichi…” he hid his face in his jacket.

He had forced himself to say it but he was not capable of looking at him in the eyes. Shuichi petted him again, gently.

“Thanks, I appreciate it.”
“Have you slept at all? You’re practically always awake when I wake up.” he should be tired too, Kokichi was worried he was overworking himself.

“I’ve slept enough, don’t you start to worry about me, I’ll be fine.” Shuichi hugged him again. “Go back to sleep now, it’s late and you can sleep until morning.”

“Okay, you sleep too.” Kokichi placed his ears against his chest, listening to his heartbeat.

“Good night Kokichi, have a good rest.”

Not even Shuichi’s warmth was enough to warm him right now, but he didn’t really care. His heartbeat was calming and relaxing. It worked just as well. He slowly fell asleep, this time in a conscious way.

He started to dream, it was a place he never saw before, a bedroom, it was not well lit and looked a bit empty, sad even. He was suffocating inside the room, so he left. He passed through a hallway and ended up in a living room. It was decorated with old furniture and there was nothing in terms of decorations. Two people were fighting in there, they were shouting bad things at each other. Kokichi could not decipher their words, but he knew. Their faces were blurry, indistinct. Kokichi knew them, but he could not remember who they were, nor he wanted to, something deep inside him was preventing him. He left the house, he didn’t want to stay there any longer, the atmosphere was depressing.

Outside of the house, he found a little park for children. He sat on the swing, trying to think about what to do. Rantaro was the one to found him, he took his hand and dragged him inside a room. It was a big, spacious room, full of colorful party decorations. The room was filled with all his friends, they were all waiting for him, greeting him, smiling at him. On the table was a big cake with the number sixteen on it.

“Happy birthday Kokichi!!”

They sing the song for him, while Rantaro cut a slice of cake for him.

“Hey Kokichi! Where is your Prince Charming?” asked Kazuichi giving him a thumbs up.

Kokichi looked around and sure enough, Shuichi appeared in the entrance. His eyes fixed immediately on him and he smiled. He walked up to him and took his hand.

“Happy birthday Kokichi!” he kissed his hand. “I’m sorry, I’m late, it took me longer than I thought to buy the ticket for the amusement park!”

“Amusement park?” Kokichi asked.

“Yes, you always said that it was your dream to celebrate your birthday at the amusement park, right? Let’s go!”

Shuichi dragged him out of the room, Kokichi’s heart was beating fast from excitement. Shuichi was going to fulfill his dream, he was going to spend the day why him. They were going to be a couple, they were going to be happy.

Wouldn’t that be just wonderful?

Kokichi was already too lucid, he knew it was a dream. He lost all happiness, this was only real in dreams. There was a good chance he would never be able to experience something like this in the real world. He woke up slowly, feeling heavy and cold, even more than usual. Tears were stinging in
his eyes. He didn’t move, he opened his eyes slowly, trying to see Shuichi’s face without waking him up in case he was sleeping like he hoped he was.

He was. Shuichi was sleeping, breathing softly; his sleeping face was really cute. He observed his face for a bit, he needed to go to the bathroom and splash some water on his face. He moved away from him an inch at a time, he really didn’t want to wake him up. He crawled away little by little. Breaking Shuichi’s hug had been a bit complicated, but luckily the boy wasn’t a light sleeper. He got out of the bed and reached the bathroom feeling light-headed.

Earlier he was feeling heavy and now light.

His body should get a hold of itself, it would be appreciated.

He splashed his face with tap water and sighed heavily, trying to shake the nightmare off his mind. It was a nightmare, not a good dream. It was really cruel to let him see the ideal world when he was probably never going to experience it. He had no idea what his friends outside were thinking about him right now, first Gonta and now this… They were probably thinking he had completely lost his mind. And even Shuichi… Kokichi was very afraid that he was going to abandon him in the real world.

He looked at himself in the mirror, something he had not done in quite a while. He really was pale.

“Kokichi?” Shuichi confused voice reached him from the bedroom.

Kokichi opened his mouth to answer.

Then it happened.

Chapter End Notes

Next time Somewhere:
Don’t you think he is doing things so erratically on purpose?

I'm honestly sorry about my lateness... today everything was completely out of my control, I even forgot I had to post a chapter at all, so really, sorry!
Rantaro was pacing his living room, waiting for Hinata-san, Ryota and Chiaki.

When they left Ryota’s office, two days ago, Kokichi had done something strange with Shuichi. After the end of their conversation, they filled a water mattress and started ‘cuddling’ on it. Rantaro had no better term to describe it. It was clearly not normal cuddling. Kokichi had dragged Shuichi down with force and the dynamic had been completely wrong for that to be natural. Kokichi was using the absence of cameras to his advantage. Ryota and the other programmers had an idea of what he was physically doing and they were extracting the verbal conversation in long text logs, but they could not ‘see’ what he was doing. It was really confusing, they were just lying there, only moving their hands a little. Nagito, as always was miles ahead of everyone. He was the first one that understood that Kokichi was writing on Shuichi’s chest in a purposefully confused and messy way to avoid being detected.

Rantaro asked Ryota if they could make out what he was writing, but Ryota said it was very difficult. Knowing what he was doing could potentially make them capable of deciphering it, but it was not an easy process in any way. Rantaro stopped him immediately, he didn’t need to decipher anything, he knew what Kokichi was doing. It was actually more important to make it harder for all the other programmers to understand. If Kokichi was using such a complex and convoluted plan, he surely was telling Shuichi about the Neo World Program and he wanted to keep the programmers in the dark. Hinata-san and Byakuya took it in their hands to find some excuse for what he was doing, in case the producers had understood the truth.

They had not, according to Hinata-san’s text message. The day after, he wrote him that Kokichi and Shuichi had fallen asleep together after Shuichi had fetched a blanket from his room. That had convinced the staff that they were probably doing something different than planning the end of the human race.

Rantaro was very glad, not only for the avoided danger, but most of all for the fact that Shuichi and Kokichi were now on friendly terms again. Maybe even more. Nagito called him later that day; he said he would take care of the studio for the time being. Rantaro was now in charge of finding out what Kokichi intended to do. It was a delicate task, if he could not find out, they had to disconnect Kokichi, his health had reached a critical stage. Chiaki had informed him that the doctor was pretty mad at them for keeping Kokichi connected for so long. Rantaro had taken in his hands the right to decide his fate, he had to find out Kokichi’s plan or disconnect him. These were the only two options.

He had watched Danganronpa, but not without grimacing. They were showing him revealing the outside world and them escaping from the tunnel to hide in the hanger. The audience had mixed reactions. Some were excited, others were a bit disappointed by the post-apocalyptic setting and Kokichi involvement in it. They wanted him to do something special, unique, not a clichéd move clearly written by the storywriters. That actually told Rantaro that his plan might even have worked if Shuichi hadn’t interfered. Still, he was not going to complain, he was happy Shuichi did it.

This morning Hinata-san asked them all to meet, apparently there was news from Kokichi, based on that info, Rantaro knew that it was early morning inside the New World as well. Kokichi had probably done something as soon as he woke up. Which was not surprising really. Everyone arrived, one by one, and Rantaro’s living room was completely filled with people again.
“So, what’s the news?” Nagito cut straight to the chase as soon as Hinata-san arrived.

“We have a transcript of Kokichi and Shuichi’s conversation; they apparently agree to cooperate on some sort of plan this morning. We wanted your opinion since we have no idea what he is trying to do.” Hinata-san tried to give Rantaro some papers but Nagito stole them.

“So let’s see…” he started to read them out loud. “‘I was just thinking that we could create the best garbage in history if you could be my boyfriend and ally. But since you are neither I guess we are stuck.’” he was voice acting pretending to be Kokichi. “‘You will never able to lie that well, forget it!’ ‘Explain it to me before you tell me to forget it!’” he suddenly had switched to a voice that was supposed to be Shuichi’s. ‘You are not capable of doing this for a long period, you see, the act must look as natural as possible. If I stop the Bugvacuum now it will be evident we are not a couple.’ ‘I can do it. I’m positive.’ ‘No way! Your lies are pretty shitty!’ ‘Then tell me how I should prove it.’ ‘Well, could you kiss me if I say it’s necessary? WHAT ARE YOU DOING?!’ ‘I’m kissing you, what did that look like?’”

Rantaro stole the papers from him. This looked like the start of some strange porn and Rantaro didn’t want to hear it in Nagito’s falsetto.

“Thank you, your acting skills are amazing, this is enough.”

“Whatever you say Ran-chan!” Nagito smiled brightly at him.

Kaede started to cough. Hinata-san sighed. Rantaro wanted to smack him in the face. Was he still trying to make Hinata-san jealous or something?

Rantaro sat down next to Kaede and started to read intently. A line caught his eye.

Are you familiar with Romeo and Juliet?

Romeo and Juliet?

What had Romeo and Juliet to do with anything?

Romeo and Juliet.

Romeo and Juliet.

Two families fighting each other. A forbidden love born in a tense atmosphere… Secret meetings during the night… Exchanging secrets under a full moon… Does this ring a bell?

Rantaro dropped the papers with a deep sigh. He didn’t need to read anything else. Kokichi was lying to Shuichi again. He had not learned his lesson, had he? How was he thinking to make him cooperate with this crazy plan without telling him?

“Have you understood something?” asked Chiaki.

“Yeah, this is another plan worthy of Nagito. You had a terrible influence on him.” he sent him a reproachful glare.

“Ohhh, I see. But how does he intend to do it? This alone would not damage Danganronpa all that much, if at all.” Nagito was completely unaffected.

“I… don’t know that yet.”

“Well, then get to work why don’t you?” Nagito got up. “Let’s go, Hajime, everyone. Our new
Rantaro was very relieved when he could finally close the door behind Nagito’s back. The guy was still having too much fun with everything. The only one left in his living room was Kaede.

“Ran-chan?” she asked with a raised eyebrow.

“He was just trying to make Hinata-san jealous. It doesn’t mean anything.” he tried to sound unconcerned, like it was not a big deal.

“But I don’t get to call you Ran-chan.” she was pouting.

“You can call me Ran-chan anytime…” he looked away, embarrassed.

Why an embarrassing nickname like that, of all things?

“Okay… Let’s get to work, all right?” apparently she realized as well that it was embarrassing because she didn’t use it at all.

They could not solve the mystery that night. They didn’t have enough clues from even looking at the whole conversation. Rantaro was feeling a bit bad as he read it, because he could clearly see how delicate that phase was for Kokichi. He was playing a dangerous game of balancing feelings, acting, trusting, and lying. Everything was in play at the same time. Shuichi was the only one who could influence Kokichi at this point. They had to rely entirely on the boy. He had accepted to cooperate, which was already much.

Rantaro started to receive video files randomly during the day. Ryota was sending them directly to him on his computer. They had the blessing of Danganronpa anyways, so it was no big deal even if they were to get caught. Hours after hours, he observed the situation unfolding, them flirting, and them separating, Shuichi dragging the others in search of who knows what… Ryota informed him that Kokichi had taken advantage of the fact that Shuichi was taking the spotlight to break and enter into Rantaro’s Lab, using the Bugvacuum to keep the cameras away. So this was a part of the tactic, to keep the attention on Shuichi while he was doing other things. But he must have been aware that the programmers were still capable of seeing him… So this was not supposed to be a secret. What did he want from his Lab? There was only the Perk there. It was Kaede that solved the mystery for him.

“Maybe he wants to keep it hidden so they can’t use it to end the season?”

Of course, it made a lot of sense. In the meantime, the audience was going crazy. They were going wild over the ‘blooming ship’ and the merchandise of the two of them were top sellers. Nagito was keeping the audience entertained, but in a much more neutral way than before. Without a clear plan, it was difficult even for him to improvise. He didn’t know if he should support or make fun of the situation. Those who more attentive in the audience had noticed that both Rantaro and Nagito were acting very moody, one day they were laughing at the show, the other they were fighting over it, and the next day they were neutral about it. It was not very good but there was nothing else they could do. Kokichi had thrown them all off the loop with his new secret plan.

Kokichi and Shuichi ate together. Rantaro noticed that Kokichi was acting a bit more accepting than usual, even with the whole act in place. He was often looking tired, pale and he was wrapping himself in the blanket on the first occasion. And Shuichi was commenting a lot about him being cold. Rantaro was starting to get scared, his health was really getting bad, wasn’t it? He had to talk to the doctor soon.
Kokichi dragged Shuichi back up to Rantaro’s Lab where they picked up the laptop inside after opening the vault with the two clues. Of course, Kokichi would’ve understood them. They hid again inside the Lab and they had a written conversation again. Rantaro was starting to lose hope he would understand what Kokichi was thinking, but Shuichi helped him out. When Kokichi was falling asleep, he asked Shuichi if he was willing to help and Shuichi answered that he would, even if the plan was crazy. So Kokichi decided to trust Shuichi in the end, Rantaro was very glad. When he woke up, they looked at the Perk. Shuichi being jealous of him made him smile fondly, the boy really liked Kokichi didn’t he? He was willing to lie to everyone just to spend more time with him; he was cuddling with him, worrying about him… They were very cute together.

Kokichi asked Shuichi to fetch them a Love Key for each of them. Once again, Rantaro was lost. He knew the end result that Kokichi was going for, but he had no idea of the road he wanted to take to reach that point. Was he trying to get the audience attention again? What for? Was he trying to do the same thing from last time? To make them all excited and then disappoint them all? Maybe, but would this work? The end result Kokichi was going for could even be seen as interesting, if handled wrong. Rantaro was lost.

Then Kokichi did another strange thing. He talked to the others on the balcony outside of the entrance. He told them he would create a treasure hunt for them and if they failed, he would kidnap and kill Shuichi. Since they were partners, this was all a farce and it was almost fun to watch. When Kokichi dropped from the balcony Rantaro was afraid for a moment that he would hurt himself, but he got up easily. Rantaro shook his head; he was trying so hard to look like the mastermind still, even without the Exisals. Kokichi spent a lot of time preparing for the treasure hunt, while Shuichi was gambling obsessively in the casino. It was past midnight when Shuichi got both Keys and left them inside the trapdoor that led to Kokichi’s Lab. The boy had hesitated a moment in there, he clearly wanted to enter and check on Kokichi, but in the end, he changed his mind. Maybe he thought he was being too clingy.

Rantaro had no idea about any of these things. Why the Love Hotel, why the treasure hunt… Once again, Kaede said the right thing.

“Don’t you think he is doing things so erratically on purpose? If you can’t understand it, I can’t imagine what the people of Danganronpa are thinking!”

She was right once again, Hinata-san was keeping him informed of the decisions inside the department and there was a big problem at the moment: The lack of material. Things were going off script. They had no idea what to show on what day and how much. They were using more footage than usual to cover for the slow progression; the audience was getting more and more impatient. The flirt that Kokichi was playing was enough to keep the audience interested, but they wanted progression as well, they were invoking someone’s death. They wanted a trial, an investigation. This proved even more that Kokichi had the right idea; the problem was still if he was capable of dealing enough damage before they had to disconnect him. Rantaro knew they were running out of time.

The next morning inside the Neo World Program Kokichi hid inside the Love Hotel using the Key and he spoke with Monokuma. As smart as he was, he immediately knew he deserved another prize and asked to use the monitors to give the others a communication about having taken hostage Shuichi. How he was supposed to take him hostage was obvious, Shuichi was simply going to join him inside the Hotel, but then what? He was pretty sure he was not going to kill him, that was not part of the final plan, well, if he had understood the plan correctly. Maybe he had not… But still, to just do something random like this after the whole act… No, he must have some good reason.

The hunt started at 8 am, in the Neo World Program, and ended at 8 pm, in other words, it lasted for four full days in the outside world. As much as Kokichi had been pretty ingenious with the riddles, it
was not that exciting to just see them going up and down everywhere. The audience was getting frustrated and the production was starting to think about killing off Kaito, to give them something at least. The problem was that killing Kaito out of sickness was not going to create a trial and they could not kill him in any other way as long as they were all together like this. Shuichi was making sure to keep them all together. Rantaro wondered if this too, had been planned by Kokichi.

The footage to show was really starting to deplete too fast, soon they would have to show things live. If Kokichi was not going to do something very soon, the production would intervene directly. Unfortunately, this was something that Kokichi could not be aware of.

The treasure hunt ‘failed’, as Kokichi probably wanted, and Shuichi joined him inside the Love Hotel.

Rantaro hoped Kokichi knew well what he was doing. Another night was the limit the production was going to accept without a murder.

Something had to happen the next day.

Chapter End Notes

Next time on Present Side:
Let’s try not to make it go wrong, all right?

Hello girls and boys, I'm still alive! :P
I'm sorry, now things are back to normal so the chapters will be out at the same time as always, tomorrow I'm going to post an extra Oasis to repay you for the confusion, see you soon!
“Kokichi?”

Kokichi wanted to answer, he really wanted to, but he could not.

His body had stopped working, suddenly like a puppet whose strings had been cut. One moment he was looking at his reflection in the mirror, the next moment he was on the floor incapable of moving. He could not raise his hand, he could not speak, and he could not even close his eyes. He just stared at the wall of the bathroom with panic raising in his heart.

What was happening? It looked almost like his avatar had been desynchronized from his real body or something. Normally he would start to hyperventilate right about then, but he didn’t. Kokichi realized that he was not breathing at all. This was an avatar, so it didn’t need to breathe, but it was deeply disturbing to not breathe when it was something so natural for humans.

“Kokichi?” Shuichi’s voice now had a note of panic in it.

Kokichi really wanted to answer, even to simply ask for help, even if he didn’t want to scare him, but he really couldn’t. Finally, he heard him leaving the bed to search around for him. Of course, the bathroom was the most obvious hiding place, so he easily found him.

“Kokichi!”

Alarmed Shuichi ran up to him, picked him up and turned him on his back. After making sure he was conscious he rested Kokichi’s head on his lap and started to check him in search of injuries or something, asking question after question. Kokichi slowly regained control of his nerves. He started to stretch the fingers of his left hand with caution. They obeyed his order, but not without making him grimace with pain. He blinked to stop his eyes from getting dry and tried to make his voice work again. He succeeded only in make himself cough because of his tight throat.

“Kokichi, what happened?!?” Shuichi was full-flag panicking by then.

“’s nothing, calm down…” he forced out.

“How can I calm down, you were lying on the floor like a corpse! You scared me!” he caressed his cheek with a trembling hand.

Kokichi felt guilty even though it was not his fault. He had just finished assuring him he was not going to die and now this. Shuichi was going to insist they needed to find a way to make Kokichi leave the Neo World Program but that was not possible, not yet. He needed to remain for a bit longer, this was not enough.

“Sorry, I think I haven’t eaten enough lately…”

Shuichi looked very sad. Kokichi felt even more guilty, but this was better than him saying ‘oh, I think I got disconnected from my avatar for a moment, maybe my body has something wrong?’. That was not happening, no matter what. His excuse worked as Shuichi got distracted by useless information and missed the bigger picture.
“I’m really sorry, I should have brought you something. That was very stupid of me. I didn’t realize you were stuck in here all day. I’m really sorry. I would go get you something right now, but the dining room is closed before 8 am.”

“I’m fine Shuichi, I can wait until later today. Help me up, the floor is cold.” with that he raised his arms asking Shuichi to pick him up.

Shuichi got on his feet and grabbed his arms pulling him up slowly, then he hugged his back with an arm and made his way back to the bed walking as slow as possible. Kokichi let himself fall on the bed as soon as he got close enough sighing and yawning, trying to look tired, but healthy and calm. Shuichi sat on the other side of the bed and wrapped him on the sheets, worried as always. Kokichi decided to play around a little to ease his nerves. He crawled closer to him and rested his head on his laps making him freeze in place with his arms raised.

“Be my pillow!” he said cheerfully.

In this position, Shuichi was not capable of getting any more sleep, but Kokichi wanted to distract him, even if he had let him lay down, he would be too tense to fall asleep again. He would get away from him later. Shifting to get a comfortable position, he smiled at Shuichi who was looking down at him. He blushed a little when their eyes met.

“Nishishi! Is my beloved boyfriend scared that I’ll feel his enthusiasm thanks to this position?” he smiled widely.

Shuichi blushed even more, looking about ready to die from embarrassment.

“Don’t say stuff like that! I’m not thinking about anything weird!”

“Ohhh! So you are thinking something weird! What is it? If you tell me, maybe I can think about it, you never know, I may say yes!” Kokichi teased him a bit more, enamored with his embarrassed expression.

Kokichi had actually no intention of doing anything, especially there were underage porn was being sold, but still, this was worth the lie.

“Shut up and sleep! I’m not going to fall for your trick this time!” he tried to sound firm and failing miserably.

So he was trying to play the tough guy again, hmm? That suited Kokichi just fine, he loved to tease him when he was doing this.

“Ah-ha! It’s night, so the inner S is surfacing again!” he sat up a bit clumsily. “I know what I’m supposed to do in this situation!” he crawled until he was again with his head on the pillow and raised his arms above his head crossing his wrist. “There we go, I’m in the right position, go recover the handcuff and let’s start!”

Shuichi was going on fire, understanding the implication Kokichi was hinting at. Kokichi wanted to laugh. He was so precious. Of course, if Shuichi was really going to pick up the handcuffs, he was going to kick him off the bed. This was all well and good as a charade, but he was not willing to do it for real. **Him, handcuffed. In complete mercy of another human.** No way.

“Well, it’s the position not okay? You rather me facing the wall?” he was fighting a smile.

“Can you please, please, stop saying this weird stuff.” Shuichi hid his face in his hand.

“The environment doesn’t help either. I’m entering self-combustion. You don’t want me to catch on
fire, do you?”

Kokichi honestly laughed at this, it was not one of his chuckling or his signature laugh, it was an honest amused laugh. Sitting up again, he threw his crossed arms behind Shuichi’s neck dragging him down with him. He forced him to touch their foreheads together. Shuichi had closed his eyes and stiffened at the sudden aggression but now he realized what was happening, he looked down at him from very up-close.

“Your eyes are really beautiful. You knew that, beloved-chan?” Kokichi teased him playfully.

Shuichi’s stare became softer and suddenly he closed the distance with Kokichi’s lips with determination. Kokichi responded just as strongly, he ran a hand through his hair and the other one down his back grabbing the back of his jacket. Shuichi placed a hand on his cheek and stroked his cheekbone with his thumb. The other hand reached for Kokichi’s scarf and started to untie the knot. Kokichi lost focus for a moment. What was with the interest Shuichi had for his neck? There was nothing interesting to see there.

Shuichi broke the kiss when he was finally able to get the scarf off. He placed it carefully on the side, like it was something precious, and then looked down at him again. Kokichi, for some reason, wanted to cover his neck with his hands. Being stared like this was making him feel very weird.

“What’s wrong with my scarf? Do you want to leave me a hickey or something?”

“Why do you always have to make things weird, I just wanted… No, wait. I forgot. You blabber when you are nervous right?” Shuichi smiled a little.

Kokichi stiffened for half a second. What was this new ability to hit him right in the bull’s eye?! If this was what he was capable of after only some days of ‘dating’ what was he going to do to him in a couple months?! Shuichi was definitely a dangerous rival.

Shuichi actually smiled brightly, proud of himself. He better calm down, he may have won this time, but the war was far from finished!

Kokichi grabbed him by the neck and pulled him down again. This time he angled it differently, he raised his head a little and bit Shuichi’s earlobe. Shuichi jumped back immediately covering his bitten ear. Kokichi smiled, feeling smug and silly at the same time.

“This is what you get for messing with me, S-chan! You may be an S, but I don’t have the vocation to be an M, too bad for you! I’m not a defenseless prey!”

Shuichi was still bright red, but this time he didn’t look embarrassed, he was searching for an opening to attack back. The thought sent Kokichi’s head for a spin. Before he could find an escape route, Shuichi had decided to take Kokichi’s hand and intertwine their fingers together. It was a treacherously move as the physical contact completely distracted him from Shuichi’s face which was now right above his neck. Kokichi’s mind split in half, he wanted to escape and he wanted to stay there and see what was going to happen next. The indecision lasted too long Shuichi had already gathered his courage.

He didn’t leave him a hickey, he only placed a little kiss right under his ear. Nevertheless to Kokichi, who was not used to physical contact by any mean, seemed just as strong as a hickey. His mind was getting dizzy and his blood was running all over, including places it was not supposed to go. Not in this situation at least. These damn programmers surely were having fun, remembering to program this and not more important stuff.
"O-okay, I think this is more than enough! Tomorrow we have a long day and I’m still a bit tired, we better sleep a bit more."

Shuichi observed him from above, giving up his advantageous position. Kokichi could see the exact moment he decided to let him off the hook. His smile had become a little sweeter. He nodded satisfied with having won the war. Not that Kokichi was ever going to acknowledge that.

“All right, I’m not sleepy anymore. Do you want to use me as your pillow?”

Kokichi was aware that Shuichi was teasing him right now, but he could not refuse, it would be his loss.

“Sure!”

Shuichi placed his pillow behind his own back and waited for him to find a good position. When Kokichi stopped moving, he lightly caressed his hair again. There was no mistaking it; Shuichi was definitely in love with his hair. He hoped his hair in the real world was at least a bit similar to this.

He woke up at 6 am, the appointed time. Shuichi let him sit up; every trace of the light atmosphere from earlier was gone.

“Remember, your role is the most important one, take everything I prepared and be thorough, we need to be as precise as possible. You need to wait for the announcement in the hanger, be careful, they can’t get you or it’s game over. If something goes wrong, I’ll see you on the other side, okay?” he told him seriously.

“Let’s try not to make it go wrong, all right?”

Chapter End Notes

Next time Somewhere:
The only way to stop this now would be to freeze the whole Program and erase everyone’s memories. But this will not happen because they don’t have anything to show on tv in the meantime. So… whatever this is, it’s final footage.

So… I’d like to offer some personal consideration on the story today, because I don’t like the idea of writing this in the last chapter and before you panic: NO. The last chapter is still a little while away, it's not the next one, don't panic!

But this is the last chill and fluffy chapter, next we are entering a very plotty phase and I don’t want to ruin the mood.

So, first of all, wow! This was my second work ever and it was incredibly long!

Originally I was planning around 60 chapters, but you can clearly see how that went ahaha

When I finished writing it was precisely: Thursday 5 July 2018, 04:08:01 am.

More than two months ago! At the time we had still a mountain of chapters that had not been posted yet and it looked like I had all the time in the world to write but time really flew by! Don't get me wrong, I wrote more than 2.000 words every single day, no exception, only that they are mostly focused either on Oasis or PQ, my story in the BHA fandom. Can you believe that I have written 25 chapters of that one in this two months from when I finished PP?

Ah, the chapters are much longer than this ones; 4.000 words each chapter which
basically means that if this was PP they would be 50 chapters since these are 2,000 words each. And while Oasis is easier to write I'm still writing chapter twenty of that one as well.

Wait, why am I saying these things that have nothing to do with the story? xD

Anyway, it looked like this day would never come but hey, here we are! I'm very happy about how all this is going, you are all wonderful people and I'm really glad I got to read so many comments and to see so many people coming in!

I'm going to tell you a couple things about the future, and what I'm going to write next, in one of the next chapters.

But I'm not going to lie, I don't have a new story to immediately send your way, I'm writing but it could be a while until I can see some of you, the ones that are interested of course, again.

Love you all <3
Kokichi and Shuichi were together in the Love Hotel.

For the first time in a while they turned on the Bugvacuum, making the production even more desperate. They had the conversation log but not the footage, so they could not show this on TV. Even wanting to create a graphic simulation of what was happening it would take time, which was one of the things they were lacking.

Rantaro read the log with a weight on his stomach; his throat was squeezed in a knot. He smiled a little reading Shuichi being jealous of him again. Kokichi was not helping, he was still being malicious on purpose, telling him that love was a volatile feeling you could not count on. It wasn’t like he was wrong, but he was not right either. People had to live for something; otherwise there would be no reason to be alive in the first place. Of course, love often hurt, but at the same time, it was one of the best things in life. Something that could make you change completely. Shuichi had turned the Bugvacuum on because he wanted to talk about this in a very serious way. As Rantaro had figured Shuichi was a romantic guy and was not going to accept Kokichi fooling around for much longer. He wanted a real answer, not his charade.

They talked about feelings and reading for Rantaro was painful. Shuichi wanted to create an honest relationship with him and Kokichi was too scared and was rejecting him. He read about Shuichi desperately trying to get something out of Kokichi, he even hugged him. Kokichi started to cry. Part of Rantaro wanted to have a video footage to see him, only reading the script of the scene was not nearly enough, the other part was glad this moment was going to remain private. For Kokichi and Shuichi only.

Then they went to bed together and Kokichi called him ‘boyfriend’. They agreed to be a couple even outside of the virtual world. At some point even Kaede was mentioned, Kokichi was jealous of her now? They were both hopeless, no doubts. They kissed. They fell asleep.

Rantaro abandoned the script and stood in front of the window, looking outside, feeling moved and sad. Kaede hugged him from behind.

“I can’t believe they dragged us both into their mess…” she commented with her cheek on his back. “So, you make Shuichi jealous and I make Kokichi jealous, wow.”

Rantaro chuckled.

“We are pretty clumsy, but they are even worse.” his mood lifted a bit.

He sighed, returning serious. Kaede changed positions, she hugged him on the side and rested her head on his shoulder, sensing his melancholy.

“I want them here, both of them.” he said after a while. “I want them out of there. I want them here, together and happy.”

“Me too. I look forward to seeing them again. We are almost there.” Kaede caressed his back. “Kokichi needs to get away from there. I think he has only a couple weeks left, doesn’t he? He’ll be back soon, whether he likes it or not. We can’t risk his health.”
“Yeah, you are right. I’m going to the hospital tomorrow, I need to talk to the doctor. I want to know how he is doing. I still don’t have a good idea of what is going on, if this doesn’t change, I’m afraid whatever plan Kokichi has will have to go to waste.” he caressed her hair.

The next morning, Rantaro read the log that Hinata-san had sent him, it was them talking after some hours of sleep. Shuichi was getting more and more worried about Kokichi.

The next message he received, after breakfast, was Ryota telling him that Shuichi had turned off the Bugvacuum so the production was relaxing a bit. Shuichi’s move had created a big damage, apparently they were now showing footage from only eight hours before. They were normally buying time using either the guests or the interview but now there was nothing of the sort. Nagito alone was not doing much, only keeping up the appearances, no murder had happened in quite a while, so no one was going to appear in the show to comment on it. Fuyuhiko told him that they were all being invited on the show every day, they were really getting desperate. Rantaro was not sure, but he had a feeling this was a good thing. This may end up helping Kokichi later. After all, now the production could not change things inside the virtual world, they really didn’t have the time to create fake footage or change things that would make things progress slower. Whatever Kokichi was going to do, they had to accept it. Either that or Shirogane had to commit a murder herself or Kaito had to die.

On the way to the hospital, he received a call from Chiaki. She told him that something was wrong with Kokichi and to hurry to the hospital as soon as possible. Rantaro tapped on the taxi window with impatience, not wanting to waste a single moment. What was happening? Had Kokichi died in the Neo World Program? Out of the blue? He hoped no one was going to tell him Shuichi killed him, accidentally or not.

The doctor was waiting for him and he was looking very displeased. He led him to the secret room in the basement without a word. Rantaro was now pretty sure that Kokichi was not dead, maybe he was getting really ill. The doctor probably wanted to disconnect him immediately. Rantaro, once inside the spacious room of the Neo World Program, ran ahead and peered inside Kokichi’s pod.

The boy inside was as small as he remembered. He had his eyes closed, so Rantaro, remembering Shuichi’s comment about his purple eyes, could not see what color they really were. Kokichi’s real hair was not that different from inside, the length and haircut were the same, maybe a little longer. It was completely black though, no purple anywhere. Rantaro was pretty sure it was not that big of a deal, he could dye it when he woke up. He wanted to go past the glass and touch him, to feel if he was cold or not. The doctor cleared his voice to get his attention. Rantaro steeled himself; he knew that this was not going to be easy.

“What’s going on?” he asked him.

“Kokichi had a bad disconnection from the machine an hour ago. His body is starting to show clear signs of deterioration. You see, we are not doing any therapy to keep the body healthy. In other words, his breathing is getting shorter and his heart is starting to beat slower. His heart is responsible for the feeling of coldness he is experiencing. As the heart is not working fast enough, his blood is getting too cold, normally we would need to make him do some movements to speed up the heart and get him warmed up but as long as he is connected we cannot move him even an inch. The breathing is responsible for the disconnection. You see, adding the shortness of breath and his heart made him lose consciousness. His mind inside the avatar was separated completely from the body, so his nerves stopped working in the Neo World Program. Luckily, he recovered on his own after a few minutes, but this is going to happen again. Normally I would transfer him to the intensive therapy and connect him to the oxygen. If he is still here it’s not because of Danganronpa, I care shit about that, I’m still waiting because of you. Now, can you give me a good reason for not helping this boy
or not?"

Rantaro didn’t have one.

“Can’t you connect him to the oxygen without disconnecting him from the Neo World Program?” he asked.

“You are incredible. I thought this one was your friends! Why do you want to force him to stay in there so badly?!” they stared at each other in silence for a while. “Unbelievable…” the doctor sighed. “Yes, I can. I can connect him to the oxygen, but that will make him feel light-headed. It’s really just a temporary solution, don’t expect me to accept this for more than a week! I’m giving you another week! Don’t forget that!”

Rantaro nodded gratefully. He himself was not going to accept this situation for much longer. Kokichi must have had his reason to waste all this time, but unfortunately, he had no idea this was going to make him lose the war. If Rantaro could not see anything happening in the next week, he himself was going to ask for his disconnection. And anyway Danganronpa was probably not going to risk another dead kid on their report, they were going to disconnect Kokichi in any event.

He remained in the room a bit longer, he waited for the doctor to show up with some equipment and connect Kokichi to the oxygen. When he opened the pod, Rantaro took advantage of the moment to feel Kokichi’s forehead. He really was cold. After Kokichi’s pod was closed again, Rantaro looked inside the other pods. They looked all much healthier than Kokichi and Shuichi was definitely not fat. Kokichi was going to be happy about that. He wanted to remain a bit longer, but his cell phone started to ring. He hurried away, scared that maybe Kokichi could hear it, which was probably impossible, but still. It was Chiaki again.

“Rantaro, if you have finished with the hospital please hurry to Ryota’s office. Something is happening!”

She hung up without giving him time to say anything. He looked at the doctor who gave him a sign ‘go, here it’s all stable for now’. Rantaro took another taxi and ran up the stairs to Ryota’s office. When he reached them he was already out of breath. Everyone was gathered.

“What?! Is someone dead? I was in the hospital, I would’ve seen it!”

“No, no one is dead, at least I don’t think…? But surely things are strange!” answered Kazuichi.

“What? How can you not know if someone is dead or not?!” Rantaro was baffled.

“You can thank me! The gorgeous girl genius, Iruma Miu!” Miu laughed obnoxiously.

“What did you do Miu? Did you temper with the Program?”

“I hacked the system! You remember my Electrobombs? When I saw the little Boy Toy use one of them, I decided to give him a little helping hand! I made the bomb so that they not only disable the cameras, but scramble a bit with the Program as well! I gave him twenty full minutes of complete coverage! I have no idea what he did myself!” she laughed again.

“But… how is that possible, the bombs are part of the Program, they cannot tamper with the outside world, right?” Rantaro was confused.

“Wow, you suck. I just told you! I hacked the system! The bomb did jack shit! It’s just a cover I’m going to use to justify the fact that the Program malfunctioned for a while! I made them! It’s only natural for them to be more powerful than intended right?!”
Rantaro was pretty sure they would not buy this, but whatever, as long as it was helping Kokichi.

“All right, so basically we have no idea of what happened thanks to Miu, no one does, I understood
this correctly? Now, what’s happening?” he turned toward Chiaki and Ryota, the two that could
actually answer him seriously.

“So, first Kokichi and Shuichi separated, they left the Love Hotel at 7 am and Kokichi hid inside his
Lab again. Shuichi instead went inside of the hanger with the bag Kokichi prepared and once there,
he set off the Electrobomb. From there… we only know that he was doing something with the
content of the bag, but we have no idea of what exactly. Miu made things a bit more complicated but
after seeing the end result… I have a feeling this was a good thing. Now the staff cannot do anything
besides watching the events unfold. You see… Kokichi’s message, at 8 am, made all the others
gather in front of the hanger as well. Basically, the only way to stop this now would be to freeze the
whole Program and erase everyone’s memories. But this will not happen because they don’t have
anything to show on tv in the meantime. So… whatever this is, it’s final footage.”

“What end result? What is happening?” Chiaki’s explanation only made him more confused.

“Here, take a look Rantaro.” Ryota pointed the monitor. “I’ll show you the footage of the last half
hour.”

Ryota tapped on some buttons for a moment and the monitor showed the room inside of the hanger,
the one with the hydraulic press in it. Shuichi placed the bag on the floor, extracted the Electrobomb
and the footage interrupted. Then Ryota showed the others ran in the hanger, searching for the
‘kidnapped’ Shuichi.

What they found was the left sleeve of Shuichi’s jacket sticking out from the hydraulic press in a sea
of red.

Chapter End Notes

Next time on Present Side:
Miss Killer surely didn’t give a shit, he saw her scanning the hanger with her eyes in
search of him, Kokichi. *The killer!*
Kokichi was observing the scene unfolding on the monitor in his Lab.

He observed the sleeve sticking out of the press with a smile. His calculations went according to plan! He had made sure to time the trick and the announcement perfectly so the programmers wouldn’t have enough time to delete anything! The only way they could tamper with the scene would be to erase everyone’s memories and if he was right, they couldn’t. That would ruin completely the continuity of the show.

He had initially thought about doing it during the night, helping Shuichi, but he was sure that doing it too early would give them more than enough time to erase it or modify it. Not to mention they could just freeze them and wipe their memory if they didn’t like the trick. Instead, waiting for the very last second so they would all stumble upon the murder scene immediately after completing it was going to give the programmers so much more trouble. Erasing the memory of two participants was very different from erasing it from everyone.

He observed, satisfied, as they started to scream in terror. Well, at least some of them. Miss Killer surely didn’t give a shit, he saw her scanning the hanger with her eyes in search of him. The killer! Kokichi bit his lower lip, amused. Shirogane screamed in terror, but Kokichi was sure it was only a farce or something like that. Momota-chan rushed for the sleeve as if he could save him, Yumeno-chan and Kiibo stood behind looking horrified. Kokichi was satisfied. He designed this murder like this both to make happy the idiot who had decided to put a hydraulic press in his memory and to make it as disgusting as possible.

The investigation started. Monokuma took a long while to show up. Kokichi wondered if the Electrobomb had really confused the programmers. He handed the Monokuma File N5. Kokichi opened it himself, the fact that he could get information even from inside his Lab was very convenient. Not that he needed Monokuma to tell him who died or how. Kokichi laughed reading the file. Victim unknown, time of death unknown and cause of death unknown. Shuichi had really been perfect in accomplishing his task.

Momota-chan had decided to look away from the truth, once again. He was saying that this was all Kokichi’s trap and that his precious sidekick was still alive. Yumeno-chan was absolutely convinced that Shuichi had died in there and was crying loudly. Kiibo was looking lost as always after a murder. Shirogane, from her position a bit farther from the others, let her mask slip very quickly immediately showing her calculating expression. Was she confused for real or was this an act as well?

Miss Girlfriend and her boyfriend started investigating with determination. They looked at the red trace on the floor, which ran from the bathroom to the press. They decided to check the bathroom later, first they tried to make the press work and see if there was a body inside, but the cable was cut. There was no power, so the press didn’t move at all. They studied the control panel and the safety function, deducing that if someone was really in there, they had to be dead before the press was lowered. Next, they inspected the Electrohammer on the floor, wondering where it would fit in the grand scheme of things.

There was nothing else really important in there, so they went to the bathroom to check. Kokichi had a bad angle, but he could see a little bit of the room, since they left the door open. The trail of red led
them to three arrows on the floor, next to a disassembled crossbow. Kokichi had no idea how to assemble it, so he had to give Shuichi the bag with the disassembled crossbow inside. It would have been better if the ‘murder weapon’ was completed but it didn’t really matter.

Next to the three arrows was a bottle with words written on it covered in red. Only ‘poison’ was readable. Kokichi had actually stolen a random antidote from Shuichi’s Lab. But they didn’t need to know that. Kokichi decided for this solution because he didn’t want to risk running around with an actual poison. It could have been dangerous and maybe Monokuma would get even more suspicious. Monokuma knew that Kokichi could not assemble the crossbow and since that was only an antidote he didn’t really ever have anything dangerous with him.

Kokichi could not see it, but he knew when they found the last evidence because Momota-chan became really agitated. He came out of the bathroom holding Kokichi’s spare set of clothes, drenched in red and full of holes. Now, he really wanted to see them figure out this one. He smiled, excited. This was the proof he really wanted them to see, not for any particular reason, just to mess with them a bit. They all start to panic even more, confused and scared. Kokichi was the mastermind and killer. Why his clothes were there, dirty and damaged?

Yumeno-chan quickly went back to her mourning; she didn’t believe that Kokichi could be the dead one. Obviously, since Monokuma was still working. As soon as they all connected this ‘irrefutable fact’, they all immediately decided that Kokichi had done that on purpose to mess with them. Shuichi’s death became more and more probable. Kiibo started to act all depressed as soon as that fact hit him. Shirogane started to cry silently, with her hand joined together in prayer. Momota-chan was still in denial but now he looked more and more shaken. Miss Killer, didn’t care either way, as always.

Now that they were all convinced more or less that the possibility of Shuichi being dead was pretty high, they started to check alibis. Of course, they had all alibis until nighttime, but then they were all inside their own rooms. Momota-chan immediately started to protest, there was no need to check for anything, according to him. If Shuichi really was dead, something he still didn’t believe, then there was no doubt who the killer was. Kokichi, the malefic lord of evil and master villain.

Kokichi chuckled, really amused. Messing around with Momota-chan was getting kind of fun, now that he didn’t have to act personally. Just sitting back and enjoying the show was very funny. From a distance, he may almost start to like the stupid Astronaut. He spun on his chair listening absentmindedly to them discussing. Miss Killer was proposing to kill him immediately at the start of the trial, since Kokichi, being the mastermind, surely would not follow the rules and let himself be voted for and executed.

Kokichi really had to thank their stupidity if his plan was working. They should have noticed, if a class trial was going to be held, there was just no way he was the killer. Kokichi, as the mastermind, had no reason to justify himself, especially since he announced he was going to kill Shuichi. They were a big bunch of idiots. He was grateful, they were making this way more serious that it needed to be. Maybe even the audience would be captured in his trap.

Nothing new was happening. Monokuma surely had to give the announcement for the start of the class trial soon. Since the bear was not appearing, it could mean they were trying to decide what to do because this class trial was not going to be held, there was just no way they would do it like this. Even the idiots were starting to wonder why the trial was not starting yet.

Nothing was happening. Kokichi was intrigued; they really had no idea what to do! This was going to stretch forever; the programmers were probably going to intervene directly. Good thing Kokichi had already predicted this and given a time limit to this operation. He looked at the clock and saw
that it was almost 1 pm. He relaxed back in his seat. Ready to watch the show unfold, he only missed not having popcorons.

“Wow, what’s that?”

They all turned to look behind them, at the entrance of the hanger.

Kokichi greeted the new person on the screen with a big smile. He looked amazing, smug and with only his shirt on, without the jacket. He was eating a chocolate bar, looking curious but absolutely calm and relaxed. Kokichi hitched closer to the screen, not wanting to lose even a second of his boyfriend’s performance.

“It looks like a lot of red, did something happened?”

The others stared at him a moment longer before running up to him and shouting everything at the same time. They questioned him. Momota-chan hugged him and patted him all over. Kokichi got irritated for a moment. Saihara-chan was his, Momota-chan had no right to touch him all over like that. Yumeno-chan hugged him as well, nuzzling her nose in his chest. Why was everyone taking such liberties with his boyfriend? Kokichi really wanted to know. If Shirogane was going to take a step toward him, he was going to punch her next time he saw her. Harukawa-chan just smiled to him, but immediately went back to her serious mode.

“What the hell is going on? Why is there your jacket in there?”

“Oh, that? Kok-I mean, Ouma took it. He kept me captive until now.”

“What? Why would he do that? What’s that stuff in the press?”

“Hmm…”

Shuichi crouched near the sleeve of his jacket and poked the red stuff with a finger then put it into his mouth.

“Hmm! It’s red wine. I see. He chose this because of the smell, ketchup or tomato juice would have smelled sweet.”

“You cannot be serious…”

Kokichi laughed. This was his most successful prank ever. Hopefully, the audience was caught in his trap as well, and now they were as pissed as possible. They were not these people inside, who loved Shuichi and were happy that this was a prank, even if a bit annoyed, the people outside were dedicated to the killing game and wanted to have a murder, more than they loved a character. They had to be pissed now, there was no other possibility.

“What about the stuff in the bathroom?!”

“What stuff?”

Shuichi faked ignorance, as if he wasn’t the one that put the stuff in there. They went investigate in there, but Kokichi was not paying attention anymore. Shuichi was perfectly capable of lying to them as much as needed by that point. He stretched his arms considering the situation.

If they had reached that point, it meant they had not been capable of stopping them for some reason. Now they were again in the same position as before. Shuichi and Kokichi working together, Shuichi being a double agent and the others still believing he was the mastermind. Shirogane had to do
something, now. She needed to kill someone to keep the ball rolling, a new motive was surely going to be distributed soon. When that was going to happen, Kokichi would execute his true plan. This one was just a fun prank, a little distraction, a way to gain time. But interestingly, it became a great test stage for the real plan. If this worked, then there was no way the real one was going to fail.

Kokichi smiled again, satisfied. Taking advantage of the fact that they were still in the hangar discussing Kokichi’s madness, he went to the kitchen and ate a real meal. He wanted to take a shower too, but it was not worth the risk. Feeling light like a feather, he went back into hiding, the Danganronpa people had been very generous in giving him that Lab, it was almost all thanks to that that he was still alive and doing stupid stuff.

When he returned inside they had left the hangar, he saw them soon after on the monitor of the entrance hall. They went to eat a very late lunch together, still in high spirit about Shuichi being alive. Kokichi was really starting to feel cold and sleepy again, but he had to wait for him. There was something he needed to tell him. It was already dinnertime when he finally got the chance to say it. As soon as Shuichi entered the Lab, he jumped on him, making him lose his balance.

“Hey! Boyfriend-chan! I’m so proud of you!”

Chapter End Notes

Next time Somewhere:
They were going to wait until one of the two would confess to the prank and take the entire hatred from the audience. Rantaro shook his head, what a sly and coward move. Not that he was surprised.

Every detail of this 'case' will be explained in the next chapter, since the outside world perspective is pretty important. From now on the two sides will work together, so don't underestimate either and remember that you need to keep in mind both to get a complete view of the situation.
“What the hell?! Is Shuichi dead?”

“No, I really don’t think so.” Chiaki answered calmly. “I mean, his life signal is still present, he is hidden inside the Inventor Lab right now.”

“So… what’s this… a prank…?” Rantaro was very, very confused.

“Probably. That’s the point. They can’t hold a class trial like this, since there is no body, but at the same time they cannot reset their memories and just redo everything. They don’t have anything to show already, they can’t take a break from the broadcast now. Not since there isn’t emergency or anything. They just have to accept what’s coming. They are fighting furiously on the top floor right now.”

“Why? It’s not a murder, but it’s still something, right? The audience should be happy.” as he said that he realized something.

This was no common ‘victim’. Shuichi and Kokichi had become a big obsession for many people. They were the two characters that were shining brightly right now, after they started their ‘fake’ love affair. Even Kaito and Maki were now completely outclassed, both in interest and in romance. Shuichi being killed was like, a very big event. The fangirls were going to scream and cry and do a bunch of crazy stuff as he saw on the internet. Like video compilations of ‘the best moments’ and memorials. Rantaro found it very creepy the fact that they were writing an epitaph for a living person. If this was suddenly revealed to be a prank… well, he himself would not take it very well if he was in their shoes. No one wanted to cry their eyes out for someone and discover that they just faked their death and they were laughing at you despairing.

If this had been Kiibo or Himiko the reaction would have been very different, the audience would take the investigation lightly and then after discovering that it was a prank they would just be a bit annoyed. Shuichi dying was a huge deal. Certainly, they would be happy in the end that he was still alive, but the immediate reaction was surely going to be anger. Kokichi was really a little troll.

“What is going to happen now?” he asked to no one in particular.

“The most logical choice, in this case, would be to reveal that this is a prank immediately, the longer they wait, the more days people will despair, the bigger the impact.” answered Nagito, on spot as always.

“That’s right, if this gets revealed immediately people will only be a little annoyed for the waste of time and the scare, but nothing else.” Fuyuhiko agreed reluctantly. “This has to drag for some days to actually work.”

“The production is not going to be so stupid though, there is just no way they’re going to allow this farce to continue for long. I mean, the body discovery announcement didn’t even play!” Mahiru crossed her arms.

“I have an idea. Ryota, back me up.” suddenly Byakuya spoke from the corner.

“What? What do you intend to do?” he asked.
“Add a Monokuma File N5, I’ll inform the Monokuma’s Admin that he has to give it to the participants.” Byakuya answered.

“No, wait just a moment, if you do that they’ll know we are sabotaging the season! You can’t just go in there and-“

“Please, trust me. I know how to pull this off. You just need add a Monokuma File. Leave the rest to me.” he took off.

“This is getting crazier by the day… First Nagito’s idea, now this… I’m going to end up in jail.” even as he was still complaining in a soft voice, he was already at work. “What I’m going to write in it…? Time of death? Cause of death? I don’t even…”

“Wait a moment Ryota. Let’s take a look around, I want to see what Kokichi did exactly. There may be a clue somewhere.” Rantaro rested a hand on the back of his chair.

Ryota rotated the cameras around looking for every little detail; the bathroom was the most interesting place. There were three arrows and something that had poison written on it, but Ryota immediately identified as an antidote, a disassembled crossbow and… Kokichi’s clothes. The last detail was the most confusing. The various ‘weapons’ were potential murder weapons, Kokichi wanted to create confusion in the participants, that much was clear. But his clothes? Why put both Shuichi’s and his clothes in there? Rantaro was pretty sure they were not going to believe that it was Kokichi who died…

“Why his clothes?” he asked, hoping that someone had a good idea.

“It’s to solidify their wrong idea.” Surprisingly, Peko answered him, with her usual calm demeanor. “Remember when I tried to frame Hiyoko for my murder? I did it so that even if someone were able to clear her of the crime, the suspicion would fall on Fuyuhiko and not on me. That was the most obvious choice. My plan backfired because Leader was there, tricking him was too big of a challenge for me. In this case, the Detective is out of commission and Leader is not available either. It’s unlikely they possess the mental ability to solve a more complex case, so the clothes are there to make more plausible that the Detective died. They will realize that it’s not possible for the mastermind to have died, so they will really believe that Shuichi was the victim. After all, they can’t see the body. I’m sure they will consider the possibility of a trick. On the other hand, if the File arrives now they won’t have any doubt, someone died and the mastermind is still alive.”

“Yeah, I sure remember when you tried to frame me!” Hiyoko pouted.

“I know. I’m sorry.” Peko bowed her head.

“So, what do I write in there…?” Ryota asked, breaking the strange atmosphere.

“Nothing. Don’t write anything.” Peko answered again. “You can’t write the time or cause of death. And if you write that the victim is the Detective they will either not believe it or fall into panic and despair. If we don’t give them that information they will hope and fall for Leader’s trap, making this investigation longer. We have to think about what will happen after they receive the File. We need them to do something entertaining, this way the production will be more inclined to let them investigate. If we just destroy them, they are really going to do something drastic.”

“Good idea! Go for it, Ryota!” Rantaro patted him on the shoulder.

The guy sighed and did as told. After ten minutes, they saw Monokuma dropping from the ceiling and they heard the familiar notification of the Monokuma File. Byakuya returned after a while,
looking very proud of himself.

“How did you do that?” Ryota asked, worried and pale.

“Oh, it was nothing special.” he smiled with his arms crossed. “I just stole a story writer's password and used his email to contact the Monokuma’s Admin.”

“What? Whose?”

“The genius who decided I had to die first and advised my murder. I just wanted a little revenge that’s all,” he answered with nonchalance.

Teruteru looked away, sweating. Suddenly yells erupted from every direction, passing through the walls. They were shouting about the Monokuma File that was not supposed to be distributed at all. Byakuya looked around, satisfied.

“Oh, looks like someone is going to get fired!”

No one commented on that.

The headquarters was in a big panic, something like that had never happened before. Now they had violated the rules of the game in a very obvious way. They had passed out a Monokuma File without a murder actually occurring. The audience trusted Monokuma, he was a brand, a symbol, and they were really going to be pissed by this. Rantaro and the others left in a hurry, to be caught in there with all this confusion may make someone question their innocence.

Rantaro received news from Chiaki and Ryota all evening and throughout the night. He slept badly, being constantly interrupted, but considering how many hours of overtime Ryota was doing, he really had nothing to complain about. The next day, Ryota told him that the investigation was going to continue. They had discussed it and it was decided they could not hold a class trial no matter what, but they could not interrupt what was unfolding either. Not after they had given out the File. That would make the audience hate the production for tricking them, so basically, they had decided to push all the blame onto Shuichi and Kokichi. They were going to wait until one of the two would confess to the prank and take the entire hatred from the audience. Rantaro shook his head, what a sly and coward move. Not that he was surprised.

That night Rantaro went against his better judgment. He started to browse site after site with fanfiction and fanart. Of course, he searched only filtering for Kokichi and Shuichi. He needed to know exactly how many people were obsessed with them and he easily found the answer. Not only the fanfiction site showed more than a thousand fanfictions already, even though the season was not finished yet and they had been together only for like two or three weeks in the outside world time, but the amount of fanart were an incalculable number. Rantaro’s heart was actually moved by some of them. They were portraying two boys smiling and being happy together. He really hoped this was going to be a portrait of the future, more than one of a missed opportunity. However, if he had read his Leader correctly, he was not the type to change his mind after he set his objective on someone.

The comments were not as heartwarming. Since the fanfiction and fanart of the two were obviously made by fans, it was normal there was nothing bad or offensive; however, the comments were more mixed. The general opinion was still pretty good, but some were very pissed that Kokichi decided to ‘date a guy’ or that he chose Shuichi instead of someone else. Or that Shichi chose him instead of someone else. Rantaro was containing his irritation, it was normal for fans to consider their favorite characters’ lives, like something that was supposed to make them happy and not letting them do what they wanted for themselves. What disturbed Rantaro the most, were the comments about Kokichi's fan who were not shipping him with anyone. There were sites entirely dedicated to him and people
who were getting really obsessed with him. Rantaro was a bit scared, what kind of life was waiting for Kokichi on the outside world? Was he going to be one of those celebrities that were bothered everywhere they went? Rantaro, for a foolish split second, almost thought he was better remaining where he was. No, Rantaro was going to protect him when he would finally wake up, this time he would not fail.

The show that night finished with the scene of the ‘murder’ revealed. As Rantaro predicted, the audience exploded. Shuichi was Kokichi’s partner and the Detective for the season, this ‘death’ was very big. Everything was going accordingly to Kokichi’s plan, even if Rantaro had no idea what it was at all.

The next day Ryota informed him that Shuichi had broken the stalemate by revealing himself and the prank to the others. The other participants took it very well, accordingly to Ryota, they were even throwing a party for his survival. Rantaro knew he could not hide for much longer, he had to go back to his work inside the studio, but he really didn’t want to. There was nothing he could do to help anyway. Kokichi was managing himself pretty well. He watched the show from his sofa again and he looked at the social media screen, the messages were scrolling through at a very fast pace. Everyone had something to say about this murder, there was nothing in the File and it was pretty confusing. Nagito was making it even more confusing by throwing crazy theories in the mix as well.

Shirogane was not present.

He wondered why.

Chapter End Notes

Next time on Present Side:
Should he just proceed with the plan or buy some more time?

Okay, I know this is a bit premature but...
I don't know how many of you are familiar with how Visual Novels usually works, but there are two types of endings.
There are the Endings, which can be good, bad, or neutral, and normally are reached by choosing a version of facts, the one you like best.
And then there is the True Ending.
The True Ending is only one and it can be good or bad, it's irrelevant. The True Ending can be achieved usually only on your second playthrough and it's activated by very specific conditions.
This series, Time is a Place, has an Ending and a True Ending.
I want you all to start and think which one you'd rather stop reading at.
What I'm saying is, you have to decide if you prefer to stop by the Ending, or take a risk and continue beyond that, risking a True Ending that can be bad.
Yeah, yeah, it's very premature since you have not yet even seen what the Ending is about!
But I won't mention this again, so keep it in mind!
I'm not going to say what you have to do, it's your own decision, do what you feel is best.
(If you are just confused about all this it's fine xD You'll see what I mean in time)
“I’m proud of you Boyfriend-chan!”

Kokichi nuzzled Shuichi’s chest.

“Wow there… You scared me!” Shuichi grabbed Kokichi by the shoulder to regain his balance.

“You were super duper amazing! You are promoted from Boyfriend-chan to Best Boyfriend-chan!” Kokichi kept nuzzling him without a care in the world.

“I can deduce that you liked my little performance there. Glad to hear that.” he smiled.

“Ohh! I can deduce! Have I already told you that you are kind of sexy when you go all Detective-mode?” he smiled back.

“There you go again…” he sighed. “You are in very high spirits or am I mistaken?”

“I’m in super good spirit! This was a huge success Shuichi! We conquered the world!” he let him go and ran to the center of the room with his arms spread. “We now stand on top of the whole wide world!”

“Sure, as you say.” Shuichi dismissed him. “Have you eaten anything?”

“Yeah, yeah mom! Geez! Instead of trying to flirt with me, you are trying to become my mom, can’t say I’m a fan of that fantasy!” he pouted.

Kokichi ran toward Shuichi, grabbed his wrist and dragged him to the mattress, launching himself down and forcing Shuichi to get on all four.

“Nishishi! What do you want as a reward Super Beloved Boyfriend-chan?” he asked as Shuichi was sitting down in a more comfortable position.

“I want you to stop adding adjectives to my ‘title’, can’t you just call me Shuichi?” he sighed smiling.

“Buuu, that’s boring!” he pouted again then hugged him resting his head on his chest.

Shuichi hugged him back, and then he started to caress his hair as always. Kokichi hummed happily.

“What did you drink Kokichi? You are acting like you are drunk.” Shuichi asked still smiling.

Kokichi stared at him, unimpressed. Shuichi chuckled.

“For real though, you really seem drunk.”

“Well, yeah, I feel a bit lightheaded. I haven’t drink anything though, you suck as a Detective.” he stuck his tongue at him.

“And of course, you’re still cold. And probably sleepy.” Shuichi added seriously.

“Didn’t I tell you to stop worrying about me?” Kokichi shrugged.
“Yeah, you did. I’m still not happy about this.” he hugged him even closer, surely to warm him up.

What did Kokichi ever do to deserve such a nice and caring person? Nothing. Well, Shuichi was a bit sick in the head, so maybe that could explain it, but still. He had decided to stop questioning Shuichi’s intentions or feelings altogether. He was very lucky right now and he was going to take everything he could until he could. Someday Shuichi would surely regain his lucidity and go away, until then, he wanted to enjoy the moment. The possibility of being hurt was not that scary anymore, this was the happiest he had ever been and unless Shuichi was secretly the biggest jerk in existence and had a very secret plan to make his life hell even the pain of being dumped was worth it.

His head was very light, he couldn’t really think too much, he knew he needed to sleep a bit, but he wasn’t sure if he was going to feel better afterward. He had a good idea of what was happening to him. His body was probably sick or at its limit with this connection to the Neo World Program. He had a feeling he was actually dying. He was not scared, he didn’t actually care all that much.

Secretly, he was starting to think it was better for him to stay as long as possible inside this world, maybe even until he would die. He had no idea of how the real world actually was. He had no proof his friends were still his friends and maybe everyone regained their old memories and now they were completely different people. If this was true, it would mean that in the outside world Shuichi would stop existing. Kokichi secretly was thinking that he’d rather die in here with Shuichi still being Shuichi, than live outside to meet complete strangers with familiar faces.

He was scared of leaving the Neo World Program.

“Kokichi, I think you should lie down and sleep.” Shuichi broke the hug.

“Only if you lie down too, honey!” he said seductively.

“Do you hate my name or something?” he waited until Kokichi was lying down in a comfortable position before joining him under the blanket. “How many times have I told you already?”

“Well, Double S-chan, your name, Shuichi, looks a bit too similar to mine. Shuichi? Kokichi? Both ‘ichi’? Why can’t you be Harold? I like Harold better. Do you like Harold?” he spouted some random nonsense.

“No. I really don’t like Harold.” he dismissed him.

“Buuu, you are boring Shuichi-chan.” he pressed his face on Shuichi’s chest, listening to his heartbeat.

“Great, now you are adding the chan to it. This must be some kind of punishment…” he sighed dramatically.

Kokichi chuckled. It wasn’t long until he fell asleep. His mind was confused, light and fuzzy, so the dream felt just like reality, with the shapes all blurred and with the sounds all muffled. He was talking with Shuichi about something, he had no idea what, and his body was going ahead on its own. He could not hear his answers, he had no idea what he was saying, but nothing did matter. He was talking with Shuichi, they were together, and they were happy and relaxed. This was heaven already, words had no importance.

“…ichi?…”

Shuichi was holding his hand. His hand was very warm and it was just the right size for Kokichi’s. They both had small hands with long fingers, they fit perfectly together. Kokichi raised their joined hands and started to examine them. Kokichi’s was paler, obviously, everything about him was pale,
but it was less soft as well. Kokichi was used to do manual works like lock picking and his curiosity would often lead him to put his hands where he really shouldn’t. Shuichi, on the contrary, often had his hands in his pockets or joined together, or closed in fists. He really liked to keep them to himself, so they were a lot softer and smoother.

“…kichi?”

Kokichi shook his head. There was an annoying mosquito somewhere. Shuichi let go his hand and decided to caress his cheek. Kokichi leaned into his hand, happy. He would have purred if he were a cat. His thumb massaged his cheek, Kokichi closed his eyes, enjoying the sensation in silence.

“Kokichi?!”

What an annoying mosquito. He was enjoying a good moment, why did this creature have to annoy him like this? Was there no one else to bother? Why couldn’t it go and suck Momota-chan’s blood instead?

“KOKICHI!!”

He woke up with a jolt, startled. Shuichi was shouting from above him, shaking him by his shoulders.

“Hmmm?! What?! Shuichi!” he was a bit annoyed, that was the best dream he had in quite a while.

“Kokichi!” he noticed only then that Shuichi was shaking. “Please, don’t scare me like this!”

“Hmm? Whassap?” he asked him looking around, he was almost expecting to see Miss Girlfriend with her real boyfriend: her knife.

“It’s been more than ten minutes that I’ve been calling you! You wouldn’t wake up no matter what! You really scared me! You have slept for more than eleven hours!” Shuichi was almost in tears, he hugged him.

Kokichi hugged back feeling very guilty. He tried to reassure him by caressing his back as gently as possible. It looked to him like he slept only ten minutes. He couldn’t recall ever sleeping eleven hours before.

“Sorry! I was having a nice dream about the two of us!” he tried to light up the atmosphere. “I didn’t want to leave in exchange for the cruel reality!”

Shuichi sighed and rested his forehead against his.

“So, I’m losing against my dream version, hm?” he tried to joke, it came out very weak.

“Well, I may reconsider if you do me a favor!” he tried to distract him.

“What is it?” Shuichi answered even if he had caught on his real intention.

“Can you make me a warm soup? I really am in the mood for a warm, nutritious vegetable soup!” he smiled broadly, ignoring Shuichi’s lack of enthusiasm.

“Sure, but I don’t know if I’m any good at making soups.” he said getting up with a sigh.

“Whatever Shuichi, I’ll accompany you to the door like a good wife, okay?” he said getting up himself.
He linked arms with him without waiting for him to answer and dragged him out of the Lab and into the tunnel. Once they reached the entrance of the tunnel, he gave him a light kiss on the lips making him blush a bit.

“I’ll be back soon.” Shuichi told him as he was opening the tile.

He looked outside, in the entrance hall, for a moment to make sure no one was there to see. He looked back at Kokichi with a smile and then climbed out, closing the tile afterward. Kokichi, alone, sighed. He really hated scaring and worrying Shuichi. He didn’t deserve this.

Slowly, he made his way back into his Lab, pondering when exactly he should make the next move. And what his next move should be. Should he just proceed with the plan or buy some more time? He, cowardly, really wanted to just buy more time and enjoy this heaven a bit longer.

He entered the Lab distractedly, not really paying attention to his surroundings. At least until he heard a strange sound. He turned in a hurry, scared.

Standing, in the center of his Lab was Amami Rantaro’s ghost.

Chapter End Notes

Next time Somewhere:
I’m going back into the Neo World Program and tell him in person.

Apparently I lied... There was still a fluffy chapter, ops, I completely forgot I wrote this... hmmm okay ahaha
He didn’t have to wonder for long.

Ryota solved the mystery for him the next day. Shirogane had taken the day off to talk with the production about the direction the show had to take. Apparently, she was no longer willing to let Kokichi steer the show the way he wanted.

Inside Ryota’s office, they were all waiting to discover what the girl had in store for them. She was holding a meeting on the top floor and Chiaki and Hinata-san were present, they would tell them everything once the meeting ended. During the wait, Rantaro browsed the sites, searching for the latest opinion on the show. He was happy to see that only the fangirls were still very happy about the show, all the others were starting to get annoyed with the pace. The fifth phase was apparently the most anticipated one, and now this was being a disappointment.

“It’s a motive,” said Nagito distracting him from his reading. “It’s certainly a motive she wants to introduce. Kokichi has been stalling for time for too long. What I want to know is if he has an actual plan at the end of this or not. This is not a bad idea, keeping everything stagnant for a long period, but we need something bigger. No idea yet?”

“No… I think I know his final plan, but I’m not really sure about how he intends to execute it. I mean… his idea is not something big enough to break Danganronpa. I can’t think of what he actually intends to do about that.” he shook his head sighing.

“Yeah, it’s a motive.” suddenly Hinata-san’s voice came from the door. “She wants to take inspiration from the 51th season and use Momota-kun’s illness as a motive. More precisely, she wants to make Harukawa-san kill Ouma-kun to get the medicine that will save Momota-kun.”

“This is such a bullshit move! I can’t believe it!” Kazuichi was scratching his head.

“No, it’s a genius move,” said Nagito crossing his arms. “Both Kokichi and Maki are currently in a pseudo-relationship. To make her kill Kokichi would throw Shuichi into despair, disappoint Kaito and create a big fracture in the group. Not to mention that she will surely be executed and then Shuichi and Kaito will both remain without a partner. This move is the one that makes more sense and will create more views.”

“I was not saying it’s not a ‘good move’ I was trying to say that it’s a bad move for us!” Kazuichi yelled at him. “Stop treating me like I’m an idiot!”

“Anyway,” Hinata-san took control of the discussion again, “she will introduce the motive tonight, in secret. Tomorrow, Monokuma will bargain with Harukawa-san alone in her room. It’s kind of unfair but the audience won’t mind, especially after Ouma-kun’s prank. Ouma-kun will be safe as long as he will stay hidden inside the Lab, but the next time he leaves it, it will be his demise. Harukawa-san won’t be stopped, not by Momota-kun or witnesses. She won’t care about her life. Not with Momota-kun’s life on the line.”

“So… what do we do?” asked Sonia.

“I… have no idea. We don’t even know if keeping him inside is still a good thing. Maybe we should let it happen and retreat for now.” answered Chiaki. “We’re not able to warn Leader from the outside
anyway. We can’t tell him anything about the impending danger. He is smart, but I don’t think he
can see the future. Especially since Monokuma will talk with her in her room and Leader doesn’t
have cameras in their private rooms. I’m sure he will expect some kind of reaction, just not which
one.”

Rantaro returned to his apartment feeling very down. This was his fault, he was supposed to be the
one to act as the new Leader and create the new strategy, but he was failing miserably. At least when
Nagito was leading the operation, they had a clear direction to follow. Now they were just waiting,
watching Kokichi, hoping for a miracle. Rantaro was very upset with himself, he was supposed to
lift some weight off of him, not put more on him.

The footage Ryota sent him was a normal, sweet moment between Kokichi and Shuichi after the
latter had returned to Leader’s Lab. Kokichi mentioned being lightheaded and Rantaro felt even
worse. He was feeling like this because of his decision. He was the one that forced the doctor to treat
him while he was still connected. Rantaro was the worst brother, no, friend, ever.

The next day, as Hinata-san had already told them, was the night of the reveal of Kokichi’s prank.
Rantaro had to be present at the studio for this; he at least had to be there for this moment, otherwise
he would feel even worse with himself. He had already avoided the studio far too much, taking on
Nagito’s offer as much as he could. This was a cowardice attitude and was not fit for him.

The atmosphere in the studio was electric. Everyone was absolutely ecstatic for the start of the trial.
The supposed start of the trial. The announcement had not played, obviously, but it was quite some
time since the investigation started and they were sure that it couldn’t be much longer. The audience
took Rantaro’s presence as an ulterior proof that Kokichi was going to be an important part of the
night. Surely, he was going to do something crazy in the trial, right? He was going to avenge his
boyfriend or maybe he was actually dead and this was going to be one of the most unusual trials
ever?

Rantaro tried his very best to endure Shirogane’s malicious insinuations. The girl knew she had the
upper hand on this one. Kokichi was going to make everyone mad and there was no saving him from
this. What she didn’t know was that he never intended to save him from this, Kokichi did it on
purpose, it was not a miscalculation. The fact that she was going to take revenge for this
manumission of her season was irrelevant. In any event, being tense was not a bad thing, it fit the
moment pretty well. Rantaro was supposed to be worried about the possibility of Kokichi being dead
or sad at the thought that his boyfriend had died. Not to mention the fact that a lot of people were
speculating that it was Kokichi himself that killed him to ‘make the game more interesting’.

The moment arrived and Rantaro almost wished the torture had gone on a bit longer so he could
spare Kokichi. There was no way of telling how the audience would react towards him once he was
in the outside world if he kept behaving like this. One thing was Gonta’s trial and being lovely-
dovely with Shuichi. Another was to purposely create a fake murder to mock everyone who was
watching.

“Wow, what’s that? It looks like a lot of red, did something happened?”

Shuichi’s voice brought a second of complete silence throughout the entire studio. Then the camera
switched angle and a relaxed Shuichi, without his jacket, was standing there smiling. The studio
exploded in animated whispering that created a noisy buzzing, while the media screen started to
scroll extremely fast.

-He is alive?!

-Wait, then who is dead?! Is Kokichi dead?!
“Hmm! It’s red wine. I see, he chose this because of the smell, ketchup or tomato juice would have smelled sweet.”

“You cannot be serious…”

-You CANNOT be serious!-

-Red wine? For real? OMG-

-No, please… just no…-

-Are you telling me I died for nothing? I cried my eyes out for nothing?-

-Oh god, I don’t have anything to say to this-

-Shuichi is alive!! T^T Best boy!-

-No, I don’t know if you realize what this is…-

-LOL Kokichi best prankster confirmed!-

-People, do you realize that these bastards just trolled us bad?-

-You don’t get it. This is a clear insult to our intelligence-

-How boring-

The reaction was just what Rantaro was expecting. Nagito just shrugged when asked to give an opinion and Rantaro said he was just glad that both Kokichi and Shuichi were still alive. That earned him some insults in the comments but he could not care less. The internet was in flames for the whole night, the ones that felt insulted by his prank were infecting the others as well. No murder in weeks, the show entirely composed of a compilation of Kokichi and Shuichi being lovely-dovey and the others running around like chickens…

Rantaro was reading, but his mind was somewhere else. This could not continue. He could not just let things going on without a direction or purpose, suddenly hoping to be able to read Kokichi’s mind. He didn’t look interested in moving things faster. He couldn’t know that his body was already in danger, maybe he was just thinking he had all the time in the world. He was not feeling well, that much was evident, but there was no way of telling if he knew he was dragging this on for too long. Rantaro had a plan. It was crazy and the others probably would want to stop him but… he had to do it.

The next day he gathered everyone in the hospital, dragging even Ryota out of his office. The doctor was perplexed, but he was probably thinking he had finally decided to let Kokichi be disconnected so he led them to the secret room again without questions. But this was not Rantaro’s intention.

“I need your help. Everyone’s help.” he declared once they were all inside the room, doctor included.

“Are we not disconnecting the kid? I’m really starting to think I should just go ahead on my own and —”

“No, we are. Just not immediately. This is going nowhere, you all know this by now.” he stared at his friends, one after the other. “Whatever agenda Kokichi has, it’s not moving fast enough and this is not his fault, it’s ours. We should have done something to help him instead of just waiting for him
to magically solve all the problems.” some of them nodded. “I thought about asking Ryota to add a note or something to make him know about his body’s health, but… we all know that Kokichi right now is very distrusting. I can see him thinking that it could be a trap made by Shirogane. I have thought about this for a long while actually. I wanted to understand his plan, so I could prove to him that it’s really us that’s communicating with him and offering our support, but… I failed. I don’t have anything except the obvious and the obvious is not the right answer.”

“All right, we get it. What do you want to do then?” asked Fuyuhiko.

“I’m going to give him a time limit. I’m going to tell him ‘do what you want to do now, in 12 hours we are going to disconnect you whether you’re done or not’. Are twelve hours of the Neo World Program good enough for you doctor?”

“Three days, hm?” he sighed heavily. “Alright, I guess.”

“Everyone cool with this?” he asked the others.

“Sure”, “Of course”, “Yeah!”, “Naturally”, everyone’s voice was mixed together in a big consensus.

“But if you can’t give him a message and don’t have any proof to offer him so that he will believe us…” said Nagito. “How do you intend to tell him this?”

“As I said, I need everyone’s help.” he looked at them again, they were all staring back, waiting to know what he had in mind. “I’m going back into the Neo World Program and telling him in person.”

“Okay, you lost your mind. How do you intend to do that!” yelled Kazuichi.

“My old pod is in this room, right? I can reconnect using that, right? Just as I would have using the Necronomicon?” Rantaro asked looking at Hinata-san.

“But of course, but that’s not the problem, they will track you. They will know you entered and they will arrest you. It’s a big violation,” he answered shaking his head.

“Miu, can you cover for me like you covered for Shuichi?” he asked the Inventor.

“No can do baby! That was a one-time only! Next time, they’ll catch me for sure.” she placed her hands on her hips.

“I see… Then Ryota, you entered the Neo World Program in-between season to make me record my perk. Did you use one of those pods?” he asked the Admin this time.

“No, these pods are for long-term permanences. They scan your brain first, so they can work on it later if needed. In case you just want to enter for a few minutes, you can use the Universal Access, also known as the Mastermind Access. It’s the one Shirogane is using right now to enter and exist as she needs. That one uses a predetermined avatar, your nerves and brain are not connected, you move an avatar like if you were inside a videogame in VR. It’s very different.”

“All right. Byakuya, can you obtain access to that system? You look capable enough to steal passwords and such.”

“Humph, consider it done!” he smiled with confidence.

“How come you are so good at this?” asked Mahiru unimpressed.

“Because I’m the Ultimate Affluent Progeny. When I want something I take it.” he answered with
nonchalance.

“I don’t think that’s very accurate…” she shook her head with a smile.

“Wait, so you intend to enter by using her access?” asked Hinata-san worried.

“Yes, that way even if they track me inside the program they won’t know it was me. We will do it tomorrow night, while she will be in the studio. Ryota, can you recreate my physical appearance to use? I don’t think that Kokichi will be very happy to see Shirogane’s face.”

“I can extract the data from your pod… But I’m not an expert on this… I’m not sure, I…” Ryota hesitated.

“Then I can lend you a hand, little dick! I, Iruma Miu, the Gorgeous Gi—“ Miu puffed her chest but got interrupted.

“I’m going to give a hand too, I can’t wait to put my hands on this fabulous technology!” Kazuichi stuck his tongue out.

“Wait, I said! Won’t that make evident it’s you?” Hinata-san was trying to contain the excitement that was already spreading.

“Not if I activate the Bugvacuum. They can’t see me. They can only see the avatar ID, and that’s the one Shirogane is using.” Rantaro’s plan was already forming completely.

“Oh okay… but you will need some time inside to activate that thing. How will you cover for that timeframe?” Hinata-san was still not convinced.

“First I’ll connect with Shirogane appearance and then change appearance. Is this possible right, Ryota?” the Admin nodded. “Just in case: Tenko, Gonta, Nekomaru you think you can create some confusion inside the headquarters? Nothing too big, I only need a few minutes. Improvise a fighting lesson or something.”

“All right, I’ll do it for Himiko!” she assumed one of her fighting poses.

“Gonta glad he can help friends!” he smiled brightly.

“Sure, I have a thing or two to say about your fighting style anyway, Chabashira!” Nekomaru put a finger in his nose.

“Taking lessons from this degenerate? Eugh, I guess I’ll manage…” she was barely containing her disgust.

“All right, guys—“ he intercepted Mahiru’s stare. “…and girls, we strike tomorrow at 9 pm sharp!”

Chapter End Notes

Next time on Present Side:
Everything else was already in place, now everything was on Shuichi, his ability to lie was going to be tested to his max level.
Great, now he was starting to see ghosts too.

He remained completely still. There was a good possibility that this was a trap. Either they were trying to trick him using Rantaro’s appearance or he was going completely crazy and he was starting to hallucinate.

Then he noticed a persistent buzzing in the room, moving his gaze only a little, he saw that the Bugvacuum activated. His alarm perked up. Were they trying to kill him with the cameras disabled? They didn’t want to show a ghost killing him to eliminate the problem once and for all? Were they going to try to blame Shuichi for this? Or…

Rantaro raised his hands slowly, looking straight at him. Kokichi just stared back, frozen on the spot. Should he run? For what reason? If they wanted to kill him, they could in any case, running was not going to do him any good. Kokichi felt his heart speed up. Was he scared? Of dying? A part of him wanted Shuichi to be there so he could feel his presence, so he could not feel so alone so close to death, the other part was glad his beloved was away, he didn’t want him to see him die like this. But… was this really a trap? He clenched his fists, he could not allow himself to doubt, there was just no way this was really Rantaro. Love-me-chan. Right?

“Kokichi. It’s me. I know, you don’t believe me. I can’t tell you anything that will give you the certainty that this is really me, we both know this. Even if I say something about the time we spent alone in between the seasons you would still think that we were watched…” the ghost, that looked very much solid, was talking with calm and determination. He started to walk toward him slowly a step at a time, still with his hands raised. Kokichi was frozen on the spot. “It’s me.”

He stopped in front of him waiting for some kind of reaction. When he saw that Kokichi was not going to react at all, the ghost hugged him. Hugged him. Kokichi was stiff as a log, not sure of what he should do. Push him away? Hug back?

“Kokichi, you can’t keep going like this.” the ghost’s voice was very sad. “Your body cannot handle this for much longer. I think you noticed yourself. Please, you have to hurry. I cannot risk your health, I tried to gain as much time as possible for you, but your own body is fighting against us. I don’t know exactly what you are trying to do, but… I’ll support you, we’ll support you. We’re all out there, rooting for you. We are not going to abandon you, never, you are our Leader.”

The ghost, Rantaro, caressed his back gently. Kokichi felt his eyes filling with tears. Is this really you?

“We’re all fine, Chiaki was not lying, what we discovered is not wrong. You are not fighting a meaningless fight. We are all there to support you; even Gonta is waiting for you. You don’t want to disappoint him, right? You can’t die on us, I won’t let you.”

Are you real? Are they all real? Are they still them? Are they sill waiting for me? Are they still… forgiving me?

Tears started to fell, in complete silence.

“Leader, you have to end this now, I’ll disconnect you from the Neo World Program today, this
evening. You have twelve hours. Do what you can do and then come back to us. Don’t worry,
Shuichi is not fat.”
This joke in this situation was so absurd that he could not contain a strangled chuckle.
“Is there anything you need? Anything at all that you need for the plan? I’ll find a way to give it to
you.”
There was something… There was something he needed that mysteriously disappeared on him, that
day in the hangar. With a trembling hand, he tried to write it on his back. It didn’t come out very
well, he was not even sure he could understand the two words. Rantaro remained silent for a
moment, probably trying to decipher a bit better the words.
“I see. I got it. Okay, I’ll make sure to give it to you.” he hugged him even tighter. “You are pretty
crazy, let me tell you this much. By the way, a certain girl helped you with Shuichi’s prank. It was a
nice little trick. The fangirls died of heartache, while the Danganronpa’s fanboys died of an excess of
anger in the end. Ah, be careful, the mastermind has sent an Assassin on your trails.”
Kokichi understood what he was actually saying. He was saying that Miu had forgiven him and
helped him with his prank. Could all this really be true? Do they… really exist?
“Leader… We’ll see each other soon enough, on the other side.” he broke the hug and swept away
one of his tears. “Don’t be afraid. We are all with you.” he smiled gently then took a step back.
In a matter of a second, he disappeared, just like Chiaki and the others had done at the end of the
previous season. When the two of them were left behind. A powerful wave of nostalgia hit him and
his knees gave out. He fell on the floor breathing heavily, tears still running down his face. His mind
was in a complete disarray.
They exist. They are still them. They exist. They exist. They exist. They exist. They exist. They exist.
They exist. They exist. They exist. They exist. They exist. They exist. They exist. They exist. They exist.
They exist. They exist. They exist. They exist. They exist. They exist. They exist. They exist. They exist.
They exist. They exist. They exist. They exist. They exist. They exist. They exist. They exist. They exist.
They exist. They exist. They exist. They exist. They exist. They exist. They exist.
“Kokichi, I’m back… What are you doing on the floor like this?”
Kokichi turned his head toward the voice in a haze.
“Kokichi? Is something wrong? Kokichi?”
Shuichi placed the bowl on the floor and hurried by his side taking him by his shoulders.
“Kokichi?! Are you crying? What happened?”
“They exist…” saying it out loud was strange, like it was giving the fact more relevance, more
substance, more realism.
“What? Who?”
Kokichi grabbed Shuichi by the shoulder as well, incapable of stopping himself.
“They exist! They really exist, they’re still them!” he told him full of enthusiasm, like it was the key
to everything. Maybe it really was.


“I don’t understand! What are you talking about?!” Shuichi was really not getting it at all.

Kokichi felt a little bit of pity for him, he really was a difficult person to hang out with, first he was making him worry and now he was behaving like a mad-man. Really, Shuichi was a saint. He hugged him with all his strength.

“They exist!”

“Okay… sure, as you say. They exist. Now, I really think you should eat your soup and then I’m going to search for some medicine for you… I have no idea what kind, but…”

Kokichi just laughed. He was happy, honestly, definitely, completely happy. They existed, he had his friends to go back to, he was not alone, and he had a home somewhere to return to. They were waiting for him. Everything was going to be fine. Okay, maybe not everything, but the majority. It was enough. He was feeling light, like a tremendous weight had just been lifted.

“Shuichi! Maybe I’m an idiot for believing in this so easily, but… They exist!” he smiled at him breaking the hug.

“Ooookay, sure… Do you think a painkiller is a good choice or is something else better?”

“Will you stop treating me like I’m drunk? Or stupid? Or both? I’m neither! I’m perfectly fine! I don’t need medicine!” he pouted.

“I beg to differ.” Shuichi raised his eyebrows.

“Geez! You are no fun! I’m just happy and you should be happy that I’m happy!” he smiled again.

“If you are happy I’m happy. I would just like to know why.” Shuichi rolled his eyes.

“Hmm…” the Bugvacuum was still activated, but it was better not to risk it. “Because I have the best boyfriend in the world?” he tried to look sweet and innocent.

“Yeah, nice try.” Shuichi sighed. “Will you eat your soup at least?”

“Yep! Then we have a lot of work to do! We are running on a schedule here!” he sprung on his feet happily.

“Are we… going out?” they both knew what he was really referring to.

They sat on the mattress together as Kokichi was wolfing down on the soup. It was not the best thing in the world, but right now Kokichi could not care less.

“Yep, we are going on an adventure! You better be ready!” truly. He finished the soup. “But first… I want a kiss!” normally he would never ask this outright but now his pride could go fuck himself.

He puffed out his chest closing his eyes. His pride could go, but his antics were there to stay. He waited in silence, giving Shuichi all the time he needed to gather his courage or whatever he needed to gather. He felt a hand on his cheek, his thumb was stroking him tenderly, wiping away the last remnants of the tears. When he started to feel his warm breath on his face, he felt the need to say something.

“Hey Shuichi, you know that I really like you, right? I may already have told you, or maybe not. I just want to make sure you know this.” with his eyes closed, it was a bit easier to say.

“I know… Thank you…” he whispered.
“You are welcome S-chan!” he yelled.

Shuichi sighed in annoyance. How to ruin a good mood. Ask Kokichi. He knows.

Kokichi decided to close the distance himself, offering an apology. Their lips met gently, Kokichi hugged him moving his hand up his back slowly. He reached his neck and went higher still. He started to play with his hair, curious to try what Shuichi was doing with him all the time. When his beloved tried to suppress a shiver, Kokichi chuckled in the kiss. Putting his mind aside, he just kissed him, following the instinct. They kissed for a long time, separating from time to time to breathe but going back in shortly after. It would have been so easy to just get lost and spend the whole day like this.

They needed to move.

Almost everything was ready, but since Rantaro had been so nice to tell him that a certain girl was on his trail, he needed to change a couple things slightly. Nothing too bad. Everything else was already in place, now everything was on Shuichi, his ability to lie was going to be tested to its maximum level.

The plan itself was actually really, really simple. It was not being fancy or complex the important point, what was very paramount was the speed. It had to be done so fast the programmers could not avoid it. On the contrary, he calculated a plan that not only was fast, but very much boring, not fancy and vastly copied. This had to be disappointing.

He wanted to end the season in the most disappointing way ever.

Chapter End Notes

Next time Somewhere:
This may be a childish viewpoint… but I want to do what I can. I’m not going to be stopped so easily.
“Are you sure about this?”

Kaede was looking at him with a worried expression.

“Yes, absolutely. Don’t worry, it’s not like something can happen to me, it will be like taking a nap!” Rantaro smiled at her.

“Alright. But if you go to jail because of this I’m not sure I’ll be waiting for you! Just so you know!” she joked then suddenly she pressed her lips on his. “Be careful and return as soon as possible!”

The connection was strange. He didn’t remember anything about the first one but it was probably different than this. It was like his head was in one place and his body in another. He could still feel the outside world temperature and Kaede’s hand on his, yet he was seeing a lot of colors and inputs from the visor he was wearing. It was even more disconcerting when he finally entered the Neo World Program, he was standing in the middle of Kokichi’s Lab and yet he was sitting in the real world. That was definitely a strange feeling.

With Shirogane’s body, he grabbed the Bugvacuum and switched it on. After that, he waited for Ryota to change his avatar and give him his old appearance inside the season. That was strange too, he didn’t waste too much time looking at Shirogane’s body but he knew it was female, he observed her hand, with polished nails, transforming into his normal looking one. There was no mirror in there but he trusted Ryota, Miu and Kazuichi with the job.

Kokichi and Shuichi were not there. He knew, he had seen them leave the Lab to get Kokichi a bowl of warm soup. He waited, knowing that every second in this world was minutes on the outside. When Kokichi finally appeared he lost all his breath, Kokichi was looking happy and relaxed like never before and now he was seeing him from up close, not from a monitor like always. Kokichi had not seen him yet, he was too distracted, but when he noticed him his eyes widened and he froze on the spot, like he had seen a ghost. Well, that would be pretty accurate. He raised his hands, trying to look inoffensive.

“Kokichi. It’s me. I know, you don’t believe me. I can’t tell you anything that will give you the certainty that this is really me, we both know this. Even if I say something about the time we spent alone in between the seasons you can still think that we were watched…It’s me.”

He got closer and closer to him trying to be as reassuring as possible. He could read the fear in his feature, even if he was trying to look neutral. He was frozen in place, clearly shocked. He stopped right in front of him, giving him time to escape if he wanted. Giving him time to refuse him, if he wanted. Nothing happened. Kokichi was just staring at him, he looked so small and frail… Rantaro could not endure this any longer, he hugged him as gently as possible.

“Kokichi, you can’t keep going like this. Your body cannot handle this for much longer. I think you noticed yourself. Please, you have to hurry. I cannot risk your health, I tried to gain as much time as possible for you but your own body is fighting against us. I don’t know exactly what you are trying to do but… I’ll support you, we’ll support you. We are all out there, rooting for you. We are not going to abandon you, never, you are our Leader.” he had to reassure him, to calm him down so he could think again. “We are all fine, Chiaki was not lying, what we discovered is not wrong. You are
not fighting a meaningless fight. We are all there to support you, even Gonta is waiting for you. You
don’t want to disappoint him, right? You can’t die on us, I won’t let you.” he had to understand that
the situation was grim, he could not wait a moment longer. “Leader, you have to end this now, I’ll
disconnect you from the Neo World Program today, this evening. You have twelve hours. Do what
you can do and then come back to us. Don’t worry, Shuichi is not fat.”

Kokichi made a strange noise, Rantaro took it as a good sign. He was listening.

“Is there anything you need? Anything at all that you need for the plan? I’ll find a way to give it to
you.”

Rantaro felt a hand on his back. He recognized Kokichi’s communication method. In a moment
Rantaro realized how big of an advantage Shuichi had thanks to his detective skills, reading what
Kokichi was trying to write, backward nonetheless, was not very easy. Luckily they were just two
words. Two words he recognized almost instantly.

**Monokuma Poison**

Of course, he wanted Monokuma Special Poison from Nagito’s case. Now it made a lot of sense. As
he thought, Kokichi’s plan was a bit more extensive than what appeared at first glance.

“I see. I got it. Okay, I’ll make sure to give it to you.” he hugged him even tighter. “You are pretty
crazy, let me tell you this much. By the way, a certain girl helped you with Shuichi’s prank. It was a
nice little trick. The fangirls died of heartache while the Danganronpa’s fanboys died of an excess of
anger in the end. Ah, be careful, the mastermind has sent an Assassin on your trails.” he had to warn
him about Maki. “Leader… We’ll see each other soon enough, on the other side.” he broke the hug
and his heart tightened when he saw that he was crying. He swept one away. “Don’t be afraid. We
are all with you.” he smiled gently then took a step back.

He pressed the switch inside his hand, in the real world, the one that would turn off the helmet and
disconnect him. He took off the helmet with a sigh, he could not see why would Shirogane do this all
the time. He focused his sigh again on the real world, Kaede smiled at him.

“How much time passed?” he asked her.

“It’s been two hours and a half.” she helped him up. “The show is almost over, we need to go away
as soon as possible. Were you able to do what you wanted?”

“Yep, I have it now. Let’s go.”

They escaped from the room, unsurprisingly it was a room hidden in between the studio and the
headquarter so that Shirogane could easily access from both. Miu had helped them by switching the
cameras to a old, empty footage. Kazuichi had tempered with the electronic locks. If they had made it
this far was only thanks to a collective effort. Ironically it was thanks to all the fake memories they
had given them that they were able to do things that a normal human could not do.

They returned to the complex to sleep, getting ready for the next day. The next day was, after all, the
only day they could use to create a strategy, now that Rantaro had a good idea of what they needed
to do. Everything was going to end the next day, the day after, or the day after that. So, in any case,
yhey had to be ready as soon as possible.

Rantaro didn’t sleep, trying to think a good strategy so he could add the poison without alerting
everyone inside the headquarter. On the spot he promised and of course he did, he would do
anything to help Kokichi, the problem was that now he was hitting all dead ends. Of course, Ryota
could add it again easily but now that Rantaro knew the plan it was risky. There was the real risk of forcing Ryota to do something that could send him to jail. It would be wonderful if Miu could create a diversion once again but she said it was a onetime only deal. He didn’t want to send Miu to jail either.

He could not think of another way, they needed Ryota’s ID. Only his Admin’s rights could add things inside the program. Even if Rantaro was to ask Hinata-san to use his ID it would not work since he had only access to the cameras. There was no way to not involve Ryota at all. He felt really bad, he didn’t mean to promise at the expense of someone else’s life. He really didn’t want to send the poor guy in a lot of trouble.

“I see, so this is what Kokichi needs…” Nagito was in his pensive mode.

The others were seated all around Rantaro’s living room looking deep in thoughts. He had decided to discuss this without involving Hinata-san, Chiaki, Byakuya and more importantly Ryota, first. Rantaro had a feeling that the guy would offer volunteer because of the pressure. He was determinate to end Danganronpa, and that was good, but to rush him into a difficult decision like this was not a good thing. So, he thought about searching for another idea first. He tried to see if it was true that more brains were better than one, since he could not find a good answer for this dilemma.

“I can’t help, next time I do something they I’ll catch me.” Miu just dismissed the matter.

“If she can’t help I don’t think I can either…” Kazuichi shook his head sadly.

“I’m ashamed to say that I cannot think of anything…” Sonia hung her head.

“Me neither, we don’t have a way to access the adding feature without Ryota-kun…” said Kaede. “Not unless we steal another Admin’s pass. Can we ask Byakuya-kun?”

“No, we can’t…” Rantaro sighed. “We can’t pass the blame on a stranger. We can’t make someone risk jail like this, on a whim. That would not be any different from what they do. Use people for their own benefit.”

“Right… so what do we do? Maybe we should ask Chiaki, maybe she knows another way.”

“There is no need to waste time. I’ll take care of this.” Nagito got to his feet. “You all find a good alibi, something that’s recorded on camera if possible. I’ll make sure that Ryota gets an alibi as well and I’ll make sure everyone knows that I stole his ID and used it. I’m going to take the blame.”

“What? Why? No, there is no need for you to take the blame openly?!” Rantaro could no believe his ears.

“Because this is the easiest solution and because why not? I want to destroy Danganronpa, and my life is not really relevant. Even if I go to jail is not big deal.” Nagito answered with complete nonchalance.

“Will you stop talking like this? It’s not true that your life is irrelevant!” Rantaro was irritated.

“I don’t particularly like you, you know that…” Fuyuhiko paused for a moment. “But I feel the same, I don’t think you should take the blame for this. It’s not honorable.”

“No, it is.” Nagito contradicted him. “Because this is not just an objective, for me. This is my personal vendetta. I want my father to know that his little meddling didn’t work. I want him to know that I know everything he did and everything he forced me into. I’m going to challenge him. I want to see if he is going to sue me knowing that I know everything. I want to see how much he exactly
fear me. I want to see if he is going to let this go in exchange for me keeping the secret about my identity or his crimes. It’s going to be really funny to tell everyone about the girl he let die and then blame on his parents. The fact that the company doesn’t perform thorough examinations on the future participants to see if they are actually healthy enough to take part in this program is inexcusable. I really want to see how he is going to threaten me. I’m actually much more protected inside jail than outside. Once I’m in there I can talk freely, he can’t shut me up anymore. I may not be believed, but it doesn’t really matter. I just need to convince some people, not everyone. If I can convince at least some people then it’s already a win. His money will protect him from everything, I don’t doubt it, but instilling doubt in some is better than nothing. If Kokichi succeeds in cutting Danganronpa major revenue it will get harder and hard to keep the police out of his headquarter. This may be a childish viewpoint… but I want to do what I can. I’m not going to be stopped so easily.”

“Are you really sure?” Rantaro was not happy about this but Nagito looked very determinate.

“Absolutely. There is no need for any of you to risk anything. Get a good alibi and just wait. None of you should even get close to the headquarter these days. I don’t want to give any kind of pretext for them to drag all of you into this. Stay away from everything and don’t contact me or the others anymore. Destroy your phones and clear the computers from all the evidence. We were just normal friends. I never shared with you any kind of information or plan on anything. You all know nothing. Good night.” with that he left.

There was a long silence.

“Is this really the best option…?” asked Fuyuhiko. No one answered. They were pretty much cornered. “What are we going to do about alibis?”

“I was thinking…” Kaede spoke up trying to be cheerful. “Do you want to see if I’m capable of playing the piano still?”

Chapter End Notes

Next Time...
“Are you going to be okay?” asked Shuichi.

“Of course! Don’t worry, I’m difficult to kill, Miss Girlfriend won’t have an easy target!”

“Are you positive we have to use your Lab? Wouldn’t it be better for you to stay hidden in here until the last moment?”

They were almost at the end of the tunnel, hand in hand.

“Of course, that would be safer. But I don’t think that dropping the key card in the middle of the dining room will have the same effect. Here is a lot more believable, since they never saw this room before and it’s well hidden. Do you doubt my brain, Boyfriend-chan?”

“You really have to remark the fact that you think your brain is better than mine, don’t you? You are so modest ‘Boyfriend-chan’.” Shuichi smiled a little. “Okay, I get it, but if Harukawa-san catches you it’s game over.”

“Worst case scenario, I guess I can hide under the floor again.” Kokichi shrugged.

“What? What floor?”

“The empty room upstairs. Remember after the fourth trial? You where at the entrance, I couldn’t hide in my Lab, I had to improvise. I hid under the floor, removing the floorboard that almost killed me during the third investigation. Me and that floorboard have a very intimate bond at this point!” he smirked.

“You… hid under the floor. Of course. Why am I not surprised? That explains why I wasn’t able to find you. I searched everywhere!” Shuichi shook his head sighing.

“Nishishi! I’m a genius!” Kokichi sent him a bright smile.

“Yeah, sure. As long as you are sure about that.” Shuichi said with a hint of sarcasm.

Kokichi’s playful side was poked.

“W-what?! I-I thought y-you like me?! W-why are you so mean to me?!” he faked some tears.

“Oh, It’s been a while since last time you used this trick. You must be in a good mood!” Shuichi was not perturbed at all.

Kokichi stuck his tongue.

“Nishishi! You are starting to understand me a little too well, I better find some new trick to keep you entertained! I don’t what to risk to bore you and get dumped, that’s a big no-no!”

“I… have a feeling that getting bored of you is actually quite the challenge.” he blushed a little.

“Uhh! You know how to stoke my ego, too! This is bad S-chan! Real bad!” he tried to keep a straight face but failed.
“Okay, alright,” he dismissed him and leaned forward to kiss him on the forehead, “I’ll see you in a bit.”

“Sure, worst come to worst I’ll see you in death, I suppose! Later Chan-chan!”

Kokichi turned to climb out of the secret exit and could not contain a chuckle when he heard Shuichi mumble something about him and stupid nicknames. They separated at the entrance hall with a wave after confirming that no one was around, Kokichi climbed the stairs up and Shuichi tried the dining room. Shuichi had to recruit everyone and ‘discover together the secret Lab of the mastermind’ while Kokichi had to obtain the murder weapon. Well, a murder weapon. The other one rested entirely on Rantaro’s shoulders.

If Rantaro failed at making the poison appear again, Kokichi had to try another one, a less effective and fast one, and just hope for the best. He trusted the Monokuma Special Poison to be exactly what he needed after all Nagito died in seconds after he inhaled it. Both points were crucial for his plan, the poison had to be inhaled and to be as fast as possible. He could only hope it would be quick enough, not to mention he remembered something about the poison being heavier than air, so it would go down towards the floor real quick, another plus in his book.

Kokichi was not being really secretive about the other murder weapon, that one didn’t need to be hidden. This other murder was not original or interesting, but that was the whole point. And a murder was still a murder, they could not stop a normal murder, it would absolutely make no sense considering the rule of this game. Not all the murders could be a triumph of originality, it was only normal to have a boring one or two.

Kokichi reached Shuichi’s Lab and observed the cabin of poisons. His plan consisted of using everything that had already been used and to use them in the most boring way possible. So it was only obvious that he chose the poison that Iruma-chan placed on his seat to frame Momota-chan. Even the Monokuma Poison had already been used, so nothing was going to be original. After confirming one last time that the Monokuma Poison was not there, he stuffed the other poison in his jacket and cautiously made his way to the first floor again.

Either Shuichi had been very great at lying or Miss Girlfriend was busy making out with Momota-chan. Whatever the reason, he was grateful that no one was around.

He entered and closed the door of the classroom with a sigh. This was the last place he was ever going to see inside the Neo World Program. Or, well, in his life in general if he was wrong and death was actually permanent, but that was unlikely if he had to trust Rantaro’s ghost.

He sat on one of the nearest desks, took out the poison and after reading the label again, he prepared the correct dose in a plastic cup he had found in the Lab. Then he repeated the process one more time. When the poison was ready to go, he started humming and swinging his legs to waste some time, he had no idea how long he had to wait exactly. According to the wall clock, it was past three in the afternoon when finally he could hear the voices passing through the hallway. He waited in complete silence as they passed by and the voices started to grow more and more distant. It was almost time.

Staring at the walls, he could make a comparison with the first time he had awoken in there, all the greenery had disappeared, now the room looked as good as new. It looked like he had spent months or maybe years in this place. To think he had awoken with his head rested on the desk on his right just less than a month ago. He almost couldn’t believe it. That day he woke up and Kiibo was near him, sleeping with his head resting on a desk as well. Then the door had opened and Akamatsu-chan and Shuichi had entered the room in search of an escape route and they introduced themselves. Kokichi perfectly remembered that his first impression of the Detective had been positive but more
on the neutral side. To think that only some weeks later, he would call him ‘his beloved’ and trust him with his life and his plan. And it wasn’t even a lie.

Just like that time Shuichi opened the door and entered the room, only this time he was alone and he didn’t have the emo hat on. And he immediately smiled at him, happy to see him. Same actions, completely different meaning and outcome. Kokichi smiled back, this time it was not a grin, but an honest gentle smile. In a moment his mask and antics needed to be in place again, but right now he was just happy. Funny how everything had changed so quickly and it was all thanks to the guy in front of him right now.

This plan was not so different from the one he had had inside the hangar, when he was feeling hunted and he was thinking that he had no choice but to use this desperate method. Only at that time, he had to hope that at least someone would get into the hangar in search of Momota-chan, now, if Shuichi’s confident smile was any indicator, he was sure that everything was going accordingly to plan. And of course, it was all thanks to him. Kokichi had done next to nothing this time.

“Welcome, Shuichi! Where everything started and everything will end!”

“Yeah… I’m not sure if I find this ironic or sad.” he shook his head still smiling.

“Well, there is no time to talk philosophy right now, I’m sure your friends will notice your absence anytime now, if they haven’t yet.”

The Monokuma Poison had appeared, exactly where it should have. So Rantaro had not only kept his promise, he had understood his plan and was actively helping him as well. He was about to pick up the bottle when the cap disappeared and the poison started rolling on his own. Oh, well, one less problem.

Shuichi was looking at the poison very surprised, he was seeing, for himself for the first time, concrete proof that this was not the real world since Kokichi had told him so. Kokichi reached for his hand to distract him. He raised Shuichi’s hand and started to examine it like he had done in the dream. His dreams were apparently really accurate; his hand looked just like that.

Kokichi intertwined his fingers with him with a grin, stopping his examination after a second, there really wasn’t a moment to waste, but he had wanted to feel his warmth one last time. Just in case.

“Do you fancy a drink my Romeo-chan?”

“You know, I started to wonder this some time ago. If I’m Romeo does that mean you are Juliet?” Shuichi asked fighting a smile.

Kokichi stared at him.

“Does that mean that you’d rather go ahead alone? Should I force the drink down your throat?”

“Hey, not fair! I remember you saying that I would make a good wife. Now I can’t ask if you are my Juliet?”

“Oh, Romeo, my Romeo, why are you my Romeo?” he recited in a flat tone still staring.

Shuichi could not contain a laugh. Kokichi resisted only a moment then laughed as well.

This was fine. No, this was perfect.

“And that is why, until the very end... Pride! Conceit! Courage! Insolence! Fearful of nothing!
“I’ll see you on the other side… right?” Shuichi asked.

“Of course, see you there!”

They reached for their cups and after taking a deep breath, they gulped down the poison. It was *freaking bitter*.

“BLEAH!” Kokichi hated this flavor. This couldn’t be the last flavor he ever tasted in his life! Well, there was an easy solution. He tiptoed and reached up for Shuichi’s mouth.

Not a kiss, his mouth was filled with the same filth. He licked his lower lip.

“Kokichi! Until the very end, you really cannot stop being so—“

Everything stopped existing at once.

-------------------------------------------------------------------------------

“Nagito will be fine, right?”

Kaede was preparing for playing the piano, she was flexing her fingers slowly, to warm them up and test the mobility.

“It’s not like I can guarantee it, but… Nagito has always had the devil’s luck and more importantly a plan B. He doesn’t rush into things, I’m sure he made his calculations before agreeing.”

“I see… It still doesn’t fit right to me that he is the one to take the entire blame,” she pouted.

“No, I don’t like it either. Unfortunately, Nagito is very stubborn too and we really were in a bind. We can only wait and see, and of course be prepared for anything. We still don’t know if Kokichi’s plan will work or if it will be enough.”

“I guess…” she sighed. “Do you think it will be enough?”

“For ruining this season? one hundred percent. For ending Danganronpa… maybe not. This season will surely piss off many longtime fans, if I’m right, but there is always the possibility of them to wait to see if the next season is any better. That is just how people are.”

“So there is really no hope anywhere?” her optimism didn’t want to make her admit defeat.

“It depends on how much damage Danganronpa will actually take from this. If they can still make another season without problems then… no. If the loss is too consistent, then maybe they will consider changing direction finally. Remember that our objective is not to shut down the Neo World Program, that machine can do a lot of good, our objective is to stop *this use for it*. I don’t mind if they keep doing a reality show, or a tv show of any kind, as long as they stop playing with people’s minds and feelings. For the participants everything is real and it’s terrifying. People like Seiko only gained a bigger emotional scar from the machine! Not to mention the fact that they are ignoring the will of the participants and just giving them whatever memories they see fit for entertainment, changing things as they change their mind. This is not how the Neo World Program is supposed to be used! I don’t care if they make money from it, but at the very least I want them to respect people’s feelings and give the correct memories. I’m positive there are ways of making this happen. We just need to make
them understand that this direction is the wrong one. I don’t care if Danganronpa goes one for another fifty years. I just want to protect the kids that get connected to the machine!”

“Yeah, I know… This is why I’m in love with you.” she smiled.

“O-oh… thank you?” Rantaro blushed and felt really stupid.

She laughed at his embarrassment.

“C’mon let’s go! The others are waiting for us!” she grabbed him by the arm and dragged him into the other room.

They had rented a conference room normally used for parties and weddings. It was not only something that would remain registered for posterity, in case they wanted to check for alibis, but Peko and Fuyuhiko had wasted a lot of time searching one that had an internal camera so they would be recorded all evening, creating irrefutable evidence. Kazuichi had teased Fuyuhiko saying that he was testing for when he had to marry Peko, the little ex-Yakuza had shouted at him for ten minutes straight with his cheeks red.

The piano there was perhaps not the best quality, but Kaede didn’t mind. As she had predicted, her actual skills were not on par with her mind, she had all the notes in her mind, but her fingers were not moving at the right speed. In the end, she only played some of the pieces for beginners but no one minded. Kaede had all the time in the world to practice if she wanted to really become a pianist. Now that she was outside of the Neo World Program, she had free will, whatever she wanted to become was entirely up to her.

Rantaro observed all of them; one after the other, the room was extremely chaotic. Sonia and Gundham were describing the pomeranian they had adopted from the adoption center to anyone that was willing to listen. Mahiru was taking pictures, while Hiyoko was tugging her clothes to get her attention. Fuyuhiko and Peko were chatting in a corner with a glass of champagne, but Rantaro had a feeling that it was actually a carbonated drink. Teruteru was criticizing all the dishes, rearranging the composition a hundred times, while Miu was criticizing everyone for some reason or another. Nekomaru and Tenko were yelling loudly in another corner, he was teaching her some new stance or move, Rantaro was not really sure himself. Gonta was showing his newly purchased pet bug to Ibuki who was making strange faces, Rantaro wasn’t even aware that pet bugs were a thing. Seated on the small piano bench was Kaede; he thought that only one person was missing from this happy scene.

Leader.

He could picture him, sitting directly on the table instead of on chair like a normal person. When everyone was seated normally, he would join them at the table and chat loudly, but in a chaotic atmosphere like this there was just no way an eccentric personality like him would sit on a chair looking insignificant. He would choose a place that was very visible, high up, and then yell about this and that, making sure that no one could forget he was there. That was the Leader he knew.

‘Your place it’s here, Leader. Come back soon!’

Kaede probably sensed his mood because after looking at his face for a moment, she started to play again, this time a happy melody, not exactly for beginners, which she butchered here and there, but no one cared. At almost one in the morning, only moments to the end of the melody, Rantaro’s cell phone rang once. Rantaro’s heart leaped in his chest.

It was the signal.
Kaede urged him to look at his phone to confirm it and yeah, it was Chiaki. He nodded at her, but they didn’t inform the others, they could not leave this place right now, it would be incredibly suspicious and some of the people in the room were not very good at acting like nothing had happened. It was almost two in the morning when Rantaro finally decided that enough time had passed.

“All right everyone! It’s getting really late and some of you have your parents to worry about, so it’s best if we go home now!” he assumed his Big Brother act.

They all instantly understood what was really going on, and the more sharp ones started to protest, to cover for the others’ expressions. They left slowly, trying to look as calm as possible and once they were outside of the camera range, of course, everyone started to bombard him with questions.

Had the plan worked? Had Nagito been captured? Had the plan failed? Was the season over? Were they all awake? And more importantly: was Leader okay?

“I have no idea people! Calm down!” he raised his voice over all the ruckus. “Let’s find a place away from any cameras and call Chiaki.”

Why they had chosen Chiaki as a messenger was obvious. She had a personal connection with them and Leader, it was only normal that she would want to inform them of his awakening. Even if someone was to try and search through their call history, it was not strange at all for her to call them, rather than receiving the same call from Hinata-san or Ryota, which could be seen as odd. Rantaro was sure they had left enough evidence by this point already, and both sides knew that well, but it was still best to not push things too much. If there was a safer and easier option, why not go for that?

They chose a little park for children nearby and urged him to call, Rantaro found it a bit funny how they had somehow ended up electing him as Kokichi’s right arm, the Vice Leader. But maybe it was his own fault, he was the one that had always acted like everyone’s Big Brother.

“Chiaki? Is it… finished?”

“Yes, it’s finished. Danganronpa V3 is officially over. Well, I mean, chief Towa is not happy at all, he tried to convince the doctor to reconnect them all, but he refused. Now he is trying to buy time, he doesn’t want to broadcast this episode. He’ll have to, eventually. But just to make sure… I may have already uploaded the video on the internet. I want to see how he is going to stop that from spreading.”

“Wow, Chiaki. You didn’t waste any time! Is Kokichi…?”

“Watch the video, I’ll send you the link. Good night Rantaro.” she hung up.

In only a minute, he received a message with the link. They all fought to get a good angle to see the video.

“Stop pushing! I’ll let you all see as much as you want! One at a time!” he scolded them, they were a bunch of kids sometimes.

Rantaro watched the video and then smiled.

Kokichi’s plan was very straightforward, strangely so. Or maybe not, his objective was to disappoint, to enrage the fans. This surely was a lackluster ending.

Kokichi and Shuichi had left the Lab, Kokichi then went to gather the second poison he needed besides the Monokuma Poison. In the meantime, Shuichi had reached the dorm. Inside, he found
Kaito in a terrible condition and Maki who was nursing him, all the others were present as well, they were all sad and scared. Was Kaito going to die? Shirogane’s incentive for Maki to kill was what, ultimately, made Kokichi’s plan work. Since Maki was so distracted, she didn’t realize that Shuichi mentioning that he ‘found a mysterious secret passage’ right at that moment was suspicious as hell.

Of course, Shirogane sensed the danger, but Maki marched right through, ready to kill Kokichi. Once the Assassin disappeared through the tunnel, the others slowly made their way to Kokichi’s Lab. Kaito was not feeling well but insisted to be present so he could stop Maki from killing. Shuichi used Kaito’s condition as an excuse to drag everyone in there as well. Shirogane was not happy to go, but she probably trusted the programmers to inform her if something was going wrong. And maybe she was hoping that reveal the Leader Lab was going to ultimately get Kokichi killed.

Of course, no one was in there. Maki quickly searched through everything. Kokichi and Shuichi had removed the mattress, so the Lab looked a bit less like a camp and slightly more serious. Of course, the monitors were what convinced everyone that this had to be part of the mastermind lair. Shuichi attested that he had already seen this place when he had been taken as a hostage, but there was still another different place where Kokichi was surely hiding right now. The one where Monokumas were created and where he was keeping the controls for the Exisals. Once again, everyone were too distracted to notice that Shuichi’s stories were getting less and less believable.

When Kiibo found the card key, they were all convinced that they could open the door in the library with that. Once again, Shuichi hinted at the possibility that Kokichi may have some medicine stashed away in there. The decision was reached in a matter of seconds. In the meantime, Kokichi was already hidden inside the classroom. The same one that Shuichi and Kaede had used to keep watch during the first phase. Of course, the choice was not casual. Kokichi prepared two cups of poison for himself and Shuichi, following the trend of Romeo and Juliet. This part of the plan Rantaro had understood as soon as these names had left Kokichi’s lips. Of all the stories he could have chosen that talked about a forbidden love, there was no way Kokichi didn’t choose this one in purpose. He was sending a message of intent to everyone.

The lovers’ suicide.

Of course, the majority of people had understood perfectly where this was going when Kokichi started to call him ‘Romeo-chan’ and they were discussing it deeply on the internet. Some were waiting for it to happen, while others were convinced that it was only a way to divert attention from his real objective. Both things were true. Of course, the audience was expecting something exciting, whatever it was going to be a true suicide or not. But this was not exciting. It was not a tragic death. They talked in a relaxed, calm and happy way because they were aware they were going to see each other on the other side. This had nothing of the classic heartbreaking suicide. It was more like… a talk before going to sleep.

Rantaro saw Kokichi trying to reach down for the Monokuma Poison; he wanted to open the vent and rolled it down. Of course, why else had he chosen that classroom? Kokichi had used the card key as a trap. He made sure to lure all the others in the library with that excuse and then, just like Kaede had done, he just wanted to roll the murder weapon down the vent. This time there was no need for the same complex mechanism that Kaede used, the poison was going to spread in the air, it didn’t matter where the bottle would fall.

He never got to touch the bottle. The vent opened on its own and the bottle rolled down completely on its own. So Nagito had decided to just go all the way and make sure they would not delete the bottle before it could spread its content. Since he had used Ryota’s ID the other Admin for Adding, Deleting and Editing that was covering the opposite shift from Ryota’s was on a break. And even if he wasn’t, only one Admin was allowed to work at a time. The other Admins did not have the right to delete the poison. Rantaro could imagine it perfectly, the chaos that exploded inside the
headquarters in the long, interminable minutes where a bottle of poison was rolling down a vent, reaching and poisoning all the remaining participants in one go.

Rantaro had no idea of how many minutes were exactly needed to cover the whole length of the vent and then to poison everyone, but Nagito surely had been able to hold his position long enough. Rantaro would have been terrified in his shoes, but Nagito was a bit ‘special’, it was clear for everyone that ever met him. He probably was not all that scared. He probably had been as confident as usual, saying stuff like ‘you can kill me if you want, I’m human garbage!’ Yeah, that was most likely what happened.

In any case, being as it was, the plan succeeded. Shirogane disconnected herself, her avatar disappeared, making evident that she was different from everyone else. Maki, Kaito and Himiko fell on the floor in only a matter of seconds, and just like that, they were all dead. Kiibo was the only one left standing. He was screaming at them, shaking them, terrified. Kokichi had learned that from the door to the outside world.

Poison never worked on him.

Rantaro observed all the dead avatar bodies. Kaito had been the first one to die, he was already weak. Maki had died trying to reach for him. Himiko a bit further back, looking at them horrified. Then it was Kokichi who died next, his body was a bit weaker than Shuichi, so the poison hit him sooner. Shuichi grabbed him, uselessly sheltering him from a bad fall, and then he died too, still holding him.

Danganronpa V3 phase 5 death counter: Kokichi, Shuichi, Maki, Kaito, Himiko.

Danganronpa V3 phase 5 survivor counter: Kiibo.

Danganronpa V3 ended just like that, with everyone dead except for a single winner.

They had all been killed by a boring, stupid and already seen trick. Not only the Monokuma Poison was already used on another occasion, not only did Kokichi replicate the first case entirely, their deaths had been very lackluster and no class trial was going to be held. Kokichi broke the game while still abiding by the rules.

Could there be a more disappointing ending for a Danganronpa season?

Rantaro’s phone suddenly rang.

“Oi, kid. This is your doing isn’t it?”

Rantaro recognized the doctor’s voice.

“What is it? I’m not sure I understand…” he understood perfectly but it was better to not say such things on the phone.

“Everyone disconnected at once! Not only the Kokichi kid, but all the others as well! I got an earful from the chief dude, he wanted to connect them back in. Unbelievable. You have no respect for my position at all do you, kid? You have done something strange and then dumped the problem on me. I know you did, don’t lie!” he was not really sounding mad, more like impressed.

“So that happened? Is Kokichi okay? And all the others?” he tried to change the subject to a more natural one.

“Yeah, yeah, I mean, the Kokichi kid was transferred into intensive care immediately. The others
will be fine. They will wake up soon enough.”

“I see. Can I come to visit?”

“Do whatever you want, like you always do! I know this was your doing kid! I just know it!” he hung up.

Rantaro chuckled.

Yes, this was his doing and he was proud of it.

Chapter End Notes

Next....?
**Future**

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes.

*Everything is comfortable in death.*

*I mean, I’m here, there is darkness, silence, no pain, no cold, no nothing. I just stay in here and nothing happens. Wow, death sounds boring. And here I was almost convinced that reincarnation was a thing. What am I supposed to do, just stay here in silence and wait for the end of the world? Will this even end with the end of the world? I mean, if death is more connected to the whole structure of the Universe I guess I need to wait for the end of the Universe.*

*How does a Universe even end? It... explodes? No idea, I should have asked Momo-idiot when I had the chance. Geez, I’m bored already. Oh, right, this must be my punishment. Since I hate boredom, I got stuck in my own personal hell, the unamusement park. Welcome to Boredom Hell! We have silence, solitude, darkness and no popcorn!*

*I mean, if I was wrong and we actually died there, there are only two explanations. Either we both died and Shuichi is not with me because I have to be punished or I died because my body was compromised and Shuichi just woke up in the real world. Alone.*

*How long is a year here? A century? Will I even be able to understand the passing of time? What if it’s already been ten years that I’ve been dead and Shuichi has another boyfriend already? Well, if ten years had passed, I guess ‘already’ is not very accurate. At least let me go back as a ghost so I can see if this new boyfriend is acceptable. I mean, after being with me, he has to find someone better than me and that’s not easy!*

*“...ichi...”*

*I hope that Rantaro isn’t mad at me for screwing up. I mean, I wanted to go back after I saw him and I tried my best but it seems life is not that easy or fair. I’m not particularly sad because I’ve been happy in the end and I didn’t even deserve it, so I already had everything I could want. But I know that Rantaro will not be happy with that, he surely wanted me to live longer and probably all the others wanted it too. I’m not saying that’s not my fault, it is, I could’ve been faster and end this earlier, but I decided not to. That’s why I hope they are not mad at me, I think they can understand the feeling of not wanting to leave when you are happy, right? I hope?*

*“...kichi...”*

*I wonder if my plan worked at all... I didn’t have the opportunity to see the result. Maybe they spotted the poison and deleted it before it could poison anyone. I tried to think about a lot of mass murder methods and this was the only one I could think of that was fast and difficult to stop. I couldn’t just take a knife and swipe it around like Miss Girlfriend. Monokuma would have stopped me for sure. Not to mention that I simply couldn’t do that because I don’t have the balls to kill someone with my own hands. That’s another reason why I chose poison, because I didn’t have to physically kill them all. And Rantaro even moved the poison himself, so now it’s more like I dragged them into a trap and someone else killed them.*

*“...Kokichi...”*

*I just hope they won’t give Shuichi any problems. In the end, he cooperated with me to kill them so*
they could be angry with him. If it’s even possible to be mad at someone like Shuichi. I don’t think I could be. But Momo-idiot could, for a while anyway, so I’m worried.

“Kokichi?”

Stop bothering me, will you? I’m dead and I’m bored, go pester someone else!

“…Takumi?”

Now, who the hell is Takumi? All right, all right, you win. I’m waking up.

Kokichi opened his eyes. Luckily the light was dim, this person had realized that waking up from such a deep sleep required a bit of time to get used to light again. He blinked multiple times trying to focus his eyesight; he saw that the only light was coming from a window with the shade almost completely closed. Smart move. He tried to raise a hand to massage his eyes but his hand didn’t respond at all. His whole body was feeling heavy and sluggish.

Was this the real world? Had he woken up? He was feeling like he had slept for half an eternity.

He tried to focus on the silhouette of the person right next to his bed, he was pretty sure he knew who it was. Or maybe he was deluding himself, maybe Shuichi was already out and about with a new boyfriend.

“Kokichi? Can you hear me?” he was whispering.

Kokichi was somewhat recognizing his voice and somewhat not. It was slightly different from what he remembered from the Neo World Program, but not really at the same time. Maybe it was just the mix audio inside the virtual world. He moved his head, much slower than he would like, even that little movement was already making him wish he was still sleeping. He opened his mouth and spoke, but what came out was almost intelligible.

“Who is Takumi?”

Kokichi grimaced, his throat was dry and his voice hoarse.

“Ah…” Shuichi took his hand and stroked it with his thumb. “That’s… Sorry, I thought that maybe you would somehow remember your memories before the Neo World Program and you would answer to that. Sorry, forget it.” Kokichi could finally see his face clearly enough to see he was smiling gently.

“Oh, so that’s my name?” he wished he had some water but he was not going to ask.

“Yeah, If you want to know… It’s Fujisaki Takumi.”

“Hmm. I don’t like it, Kokichi is more special.” and his real identity; Takumi decided to enter Danganronpa so he couldn’t protest if he was dead now.

“I can’t say I disagree.” Shuichi smiled again and slowly moved his hand to his cheek as if he was asking for permission.

That reminded Kokichi about something.

“My hair is not purple, is it?” he had a feeling he already knew the answer.

“No, it’s full black. But that’s fine, you are still… cute.” Shuichi blushed a little.
“And you’re not fat. That’s a relief.”

Shuichi chuckled then sighed deeply.

“I’m so glad you finally woke up. I’m going to have to call the doctor soon, but I wanted to talk with you for a moment before that.”

“Did I sleep for long?” of course, he was asking if much time had passed since he was disconnected and Shuichi understood.

“Three weeks,” he answered sadly.

*Three weeks?*

Shuichi could read the dismay in his expression.

“Yes, three weeks. Your body was very, very weak. You were under intensive treatment for a long time. Apparently, even a guy called Komaeda took less time waking up compared to you, because he was a little physically stronger than you and our season dragged way longer than V2 and V1. You were a little underweight to begin with. I was really worried about you, you know? Amami-kun apologized to me for having kept you inside, even if the doctor was opposed, but I’m still a bit mad about that. And you! You knew, but you wasted time nevertheless! I’m very mad at you, Kokichi!”

Kokichi didn’t say anything. His throat was hurting and he really deserved it, so there was no way he could defend himself. Shuichi sighed.

“Well, you are awake now, that’s good.” he smiled at him. “I need to call the doctor, are you ready to see him?”

Kokichi didn’t want him to leave, nor he wanted to see any doctor, but he was sure he had to. He made a very tiny nod and Shuichi got up, tightened his grip on Kokichi’s hand for a second before going away.

The doctor arrived immediately. It was an old man, Kokichi could immediately see he was no ordinary pushover but he looked like a good person. Even if Kokichi was surely never going to blindly put trust in someone like a certain Momo-idiot, he was a good judge of character. He was feeling quite safe in his hands as he was examining him while murmuring something or another. He could only understand some words. Something about kids, responsibility, and idiocy. He thought he heard Rantaro’s last name in there somewhere. Why was everyone mentioning Love-me-chan? It was like he had become a super popular person out here. If so, he had to see this new version of his Big Brother.

The doctor finished the examination and the results were that he was recovering, but he needed a period of hospitalization to recover his muscular tone. His life was not in danger anymore, not after all the IVs he had gotten while he was still unconscious. He gave him a cup of milk and honey for his throat and he recommended him to eat as much as he felt like for the next days.

When he went away, Shuichi returned to the room with a smile. He probably already knew that he was going to be okay.

“I brought you a visitor; do you feel like seeing him? If you are tired we can do this tomorrow or another day.” he asked him with a hand still on the doorknob.

He had an idea who that must be. He gave him a nod. Shuichi opened the door and nodded to the person outside. Rantaro entered the room and his eyes immediately were on him, he greeted him with
a huge smile. Kokichi responded with a smile of his own. He saw Shuichi putting himself in a corner, unsure if he should maybe leave. That gave him an idea.

He raised his arms, they were shaking a bit and did raise only by a few inches, but the gesture was obvious. He was asking for a hug. Rantaro looked a bit confused, but he started to walk closer to hug him. Kokichi observed Shuichi’s reaction with the corner of his eye. The guy was looking away trying to keep his face straight but failing. When Rantaro was just a step away from him, he dropped his arms. Rantaro stopped and observed the situation a moment before pursing his lips.

“Can you not use me as an excuse to make your boyfriend jealous, please?”

Kokichi stuck his tongue at him, while Shuichi was fidgeting, blushing a little and looking away. Rantaro closed the distance and karate-chop his head lightly. Kokichi smiled feeling really happy to see him again. Rantaro grabbed his head and ruffled his hair.

“We see each other after a century and the first thing you have to do is screw with me. You never change, do you lil’bro?”

“Hm-hm-hm!” he could not do his signature laugh so he contented himself with humming a bit.

After that, he gestured them both to sit next to him, of course he reserved the best spot, right on the bed next to him, to his boyfriend.

“Are the others okay?” he asked both of them.

He wanted to know about both about the previous cast and V3’s as well.

“Yes, everyone is fine, except maybe Mikan.” answered Rantaro.

“Yes, they are all fine, some of them have gone back home.” answered Shuichi.

“Good. Thank you for the poison, Love-me-chan.” normally he would make all this a lot more complicated and not say this in such a direct way but he really needed to make sure he knew he appreciated it.

“Oh, you don’t have to thank me for that. That’s Nagito’s accomplishment. Unfortunately, you won’t be able to thank him directly for a while, but I can do that for you. I… I guess I should explain it all to you, but… are you sure it’s okay to talk so much right now? Maybe you need to rest.” he exchanged a glance with Shuichi, silently asking him what was best to do.

“If I just have to listen it’s fine. If I fall asleep sing me a lullaby.” Kokichi smiled a little.

Rantaro started to narrate a long story. He told him about some people Kokichi didn’t know, someone called Hinata Hajime and the Admin they met that one time, called Mitarai Ryota. Everyone else was present in the story too, like Byakuya, Nagito, Chiaki even Shirogane. He described the show on TV, the way they could see the footage in advance. Kokichi would have never expected that the time was so slow inside the Neo World Program, had he known he would’ve probably given up. He would’ve given up on the plan with the poison. He would have taken for granted that they would have stopped the poison. Basically his plan to make things too fast to stop had failed. So how had his plan actually worked? Wait, had it actually worked? He still was missing that part of the story.

“So, after your body started to seriously deteriorate, the doctor gave me a time limit and I was trying to understand your plan, but besides Romeo and Juliet, I could not understand anything else. You really made things chaotic enough for us on the outside!” Rantaro looked proud of him.
“There is one thing I don’t understand myself,” said Shuichi, “why did they put a poison like that in the show? Didn’t they think that it could be used like this?”

“It was not their choice to add it. We added it by messing with the program! Well, Nagito did.” Rantaro answered for him.

“But… They didn’t realize that Kokichi was hiding such poison?” he asked again.

“No, he didn’t hide it. We deleted it before they could find about it. But… I’m surprised you designed a plan with that poison. Didn’t you noticed it was gone?” Rantaro asked Kokichi.

Kokichi cleared his throat a little.

“I did. I knew from the beginning someone was adding and removing stuff in the program. After all, someone added memories of poisons in my head during the fourth investigation. And when I received memories of Monokuma Poison I was sure someone was scrambling with my head again. And considering the fact that this particular poison was chosen, I thought there was a good chance that it was someone on my side that was adding that memory. So that’s why I decided to try that idea. And when I saw that the poison was gone after the moment to use it ended, I knew it had to be something strange.”

“Wait… Memories of poisons during the fourth investigation?” Rantaro looked confused.

“Yeah. When I checked the poisons for the first time, my head was hurting like crazy and I didn’t memorize a single letter. Yet, later after Iruma-chan’s murder, I immediately recognized the bottle. Someone helped me with that. So of course, when another memory of another poison was in my head I immediately knew something was up. I’m glad it was Nagito who did that.”

Kokichi noticed that Rantaro looked lost in thought.

“I see… Wow… I would have never noticed something like that.” Shuichi was impressed.

“Just because you didn’t know where to look at. Otherwise, I’m sure you would have.” Kokichi wanted to shrug.

“So, what happened after that?” asked Shuichi.

“After I realized that he was going to die in the real world soon enough, I decided to enter the Neo World Program myself.” answered Rantaro.

“Were you able to enter again easily?”

“No, I couldn’t connect with my pod again, so I had to steal Shirogane’s personal connection. Miu and Kazuichi helped with that. And Ryota helped with the physical form of the avatar to show you. I was pretty sure you would not accept me in Shirogane’s body.”

“Hell no.” Kokichi deadpanned.

Rantaro and Shuichi both chuckled.

“So, I entered the program and told you all about the time limit and thank god you actually listened to me! I was really scared you would ignore me!” Rantaro smiled.

“Is this when you were acting very strange? Saying things that didn’t make sense?” Shuichi asked him.
Kokichi nodded.

Rantaro then explained the last part of the plan. How Nagito offered to add the poison himself using the Admin ID.

“So… what happened after that? My plan worked… right?”

“Yeah, it worked. They all died, except for Kiibo. And, well, Shirogane, but she doesn’t really count. They couldn’t stop the poison because Nagito was keeping the Editing Admin ID as a hostage. Honestly, I was pretty impressed. He thought about everything. He timed his access to the program with the time Ryota reported the stolen ID to the company. Hinata-san accompanied him to report it so they were together all the time and directly under the eyes of the superiors. This gave them perfect alibis for the moment. Nagito took the entire blame.”

“You are all covered then? I mean, I’m worried about this Nagito guy you two are talking about, but all of you are not suspected, right? Everything is fine, right?” Shuichi asked, worried.

“Well, yeah, I guess. They kinda questioned us, but nothing more than that; they probably never found any proof. Hinata-san left his job after the end of the season, there is no more room for him there, nor does he want to be there. Ryota was fired, but I doubt that is an actual problem. Honestly the guy could use some long period of rest, he looks a corpse just like you!” he pitched Kokichi’s cheeks.

“And… what happened to Nagito-san?” asked Shuichi.

“I really don’t think he is the type of guy you have to add –san to it… Anyways, he turned himself to the police.”

“What??”

“Yeah… It’s complicated, but basically he turned himself in. Chief Towa, his father, didn’t want to drag him to the police, so even if Nagito basically threw himself into their arms they just delayed the decision. Nagito didn’t want to risk them covering their tracks so he decided to turn himself in. For now, the situation hasn’t moved much, but probably some investigation will happen.”

“His father?” Kokichi felt like he was completely lost.

“Yeah… That’s a long story too but yeah, Nagito’s real identity is the Chief’s son. I can give you all the details but maybe another day. The point is… Nagito is going to drag a lot of secrets out in the open and we will be there to see what’s happening.”

“What about Danganronpa? Was the show damaged by me at all?” this was the last thing he really wanted to hear.

“Yes, of course, your help was greatly appreciated. And thanks to Chiaki the effect of this season is becoming really big. You see, initially Chief Towa didn’t want to show this finale at all. He tried to reconnect you all, to create a fake scenario… anything. But Chiaki downloaded the footage of your deaths and uploaded it on the internet with one of those super click bait title: “What the Danganronpa company is not telling us!!”. And then she wrote a lot of stuff about all the participants being dead for days and the producer not wanting to tell them… This created a lot of noise. For the first time in a long while, one episode of Danganronpa didn’t air. So the fans took this as confirmation of the article and the news blew out of proportion.”

“So are they going to stop?” Kokichi could sense that this was not going to be so easy.
“No… at least not for now. This season is causing a lot of trouble, but they are planning to try and do another one. Since there is no survivor to use, they are thinking about trying a different format entirely. Chiaki is still fighting. Even now. Only the future will tell us how this actually influenced the destiny of Danganronpa.”

Kokichi nodded, taking a deep breath.

“I think you should rest now, we’ll see you later, Leader.” he winked and left with a wave of his hand.

Shuichi tightened his grip on Kokichi’s hand for a second and then got up.

“As much as seeing you sleep kind of reminds me of bad things, I think it’s best to rest for now. I’ll see you later okay?”

Kokichi grabbed his hand as he was starting to walk away and when Shuichi looked back at him, he shook his head.

“Stay, I… don’t want to be alone.”

Shuichi smiled and climbed on the bed again, he maneuvered around until they were hugging. Shuichi started to stroke his hair as usual. There was nothing to be done there; Shuichi loved his hair no matter in what world they were in.

The next day, Kokichi had to go through a lot of exams and the doctor and the nurses made him move almost all his muscles. By the end of it, he was completely exhausted. Luckily, Shuichi was nearby all the time so he could regain his courage just by looking at him. He wanted to be able to walk and do things with him as soon as possible.

“By the way, you know my name, but I still don’t know yours.” Kokichi made a fake innocent face, not really hiding his question.

“Oh, that… It’s Yuuta… Kirigiri Yuuta.” he answered a bit hesitantly.

“Yuuta hmm? It’s a cute name.” it really was cute.

“Yeah sure… Call me Shuichi anyway.” he concluded the discussion quickly.

Suddenly the door swung opened with a bang making them jump.

“YOOO! Leader! Nice to see you again! Your boyfriend there is guarding you so tightly we have yet to see you!” Ibuki was yelling with her usual loud voice.

“N-no! I wasn’t guarding him! It’s just that the doctor told me that only one person should be here at a time while he was sleeping, so…” Shuichi tired to make some excuses for himself.

“Ohh, I see! You really are a jealous boyfriend!” Kokichi smiled, Shuichi blushed looking away.

“I told you it’s not that…”

“Anyway. So you have met everyone else already? She is Ibuki, have you already been introduced to her?” Kokichi asked while Ibuki was taking the seat next to his bed with a huge smile.

“Ah, no, I haven’t been introduced yet. But I think I already saw them in the hospital they are… a colorful bunch.”
A colorful bunch. His boyfriend was just too precious.

“Hi!! I’m Ibuki!! I’m the Ultimate Musician! Nice to meet ya!!” she yelled happily.

“Nice to meet you. Musician… Have you met Akamatsu-san already?” Shuichi was polite as usual.

“Yeeah! We already shared all our interests! She’s cool!!” Ibuki gave him a thumbs up. “By the way, I know you two are totally into BL, but just saying, she is taken, so you better take good care of Leader!”

“I don’t… I mean, I…” Shuichi was confused.

“Yeah, thank you Ibuki, your help was appreciated.” Kokichi changed the subject. “Who took her anyway?”

“Can you not talking about me like I’m an object?” Akamatsu-chan was at the door, smiling with condescendence. “I come here to see an old friend and this is what I got?”

“Yo! Kacchan! Nice to see you!” Ibuki sing sang.

“Kacchan…?” what had happened while he was taking a nap inside the Neo World Program?

“Hi Shuichi.” she nodded at him and he nodded back, they had probably already met considering how they were calming greeting each other. “Kokichi, I’m happy to see you awake! Are you feeling okay?”

“Hi Shuichi.” she nodded at him and he nodded back, they had probably already met considering how they were calming greeting each other. “Kokichi, I’m happy to see you awake! Are you feeling okay?”

“Yeah, Kacchan, thank you for your concern!” Kokichi sing sang mimicking Ibuki.

Shuichi sent him a look of annoyance and Kokichi fought a smile. Akamatsu-chan smiled as well.

“I see, I know that you give nicknames only to your close friends, so I’m a close friend right now! Thank you!”

Kokichi was actually speechless; she was quite smart when she wanted to be!

“Well, I guess I can allow that…” he shrugged with a little of difficulty considering his soreness. “You still haven’t told me who took you.”

“No one took me. But if you are asking me who is my boyfriend… It’s Fukawa Ryoji.” she said looking away.

“Who’s that?” all three asked.

“I’ll leave you hanging for a little while longer. Hanging? Got that?” she smiled.

Shuichi whimpered a little at her horrendous joke.

“Wow girl, you hung out too much with Nagito, I’m telling you.” Kokichi deadpanned.

“Hmm, yeah, sorry that was bad, my bad!” she scratched her head.

They talked for a while longer, but they were not capable of getting her to say who her boyfriend was. Only Ibuki knew but she didn't want to say either.

After the two girls left, the time for visitors ended and no one else come for the day. The next day he got three visitors: Mahiru, Hiyoko and Peko.
“Hi Leader!” Hiyoko ran up to him and hugged him.

Kokichi was stunned; the girl he remembered was very different. Both in physical appearance and personality. The Hiyoko he remembered was short, foul-mouthed and not very respectful of him or his title. Now she was calling him Leader and hugging him?

“Sorry Kokichi, I hope she doesn’t bother you.” Mahiru grabbed her by the collar and dragged her away.

“Nice to see you again, Leader.” Peko bowed a little to him.

“Boyfriend-chan meet the Ultimate Dancer, Photographer and Swordswoman.” Kokichi made the honors.

They talked for a while, they told him about all they were doing now that they were in the outside world.

“And now we are searching for a good wedding dress for Peko and her marriage!” Hiyoko sneered at her.

“We are not searching for any wedding dress, I’m not marrying, I’m still a teenager you know?” Peko was not perturbed; it was like Hiyoko had tried this joke a lot of times before.

“Ohh, does this mean that your love story with Fuyuhiko is going smoothly, yes?” Kokichi asked cheerfully.

“Y-yeah, I guess… You can call it that…” Peko was almost showing signs of being flustered, a rare sight.

The three girls started to bicker about relationships and marriage. As time was passing, Kokichi realized that Hiyoko and Mahiru were not only as close as they were in the Neo World Program, they were actually closer. Whatever their relationship was now, it surely did a lot of good to Hiyoko. Kokichi was surprised to see how Peko was interacting with the two girls considering that she was responsible for killing one of them. If killer and victim could become friends in the real world, maybe there was hope for him as well… Or maybe not. Who knows.

Later during the day was Nekomaru and Teruteru’s turn to appear. Nekomaru’s loud voice was making Kokichi’s ears hurt a little, but he was making the atmosphere lively, so that was good. The short guy was a lot more nervous around him and Kokichi could see it, he had been the one to discover his crime and condemn him, not to mention he never got an opportunity to become his Leader. Nekomaru, on the other hand, was chatting loudly about Chabashira-chan and how they had decided to start a training regimen. Kokichi found peculiar that everyone seemed to live very close by and no one had told him where they were living yet.

“We are you living? Have you returned to your families or what?”

“Oh, that, no we haven’t. Well, at least the majority of us haven’t. You see, not everyone wanted to go back to their family and Danganronpa provided us with an apartment for each of us. It made sense to accept. Me and Tenko, personally, are living in the complex, while Teruteru had returned home. What do you think you are going to do?” Nekomaru asked.

“I don’t know for sure, but I’m not eager to know more about my family to be honest.” he didn’t want to know anything at all actually. “So… am I supposed to live in the complex as well? How come that a bunch of minors is allowed to live in there alone?”
“You are kinda asking the wrong person, but… as far as I’m aware our families gave the permission to enter the show and to let us live alone afterward. Is one of those clauses Danganronpa put in the contract we signed before going into their virtual world.” Nekomaru crossed his big arms. “I would like to explain it to you better, but I’m afraid you’ll have to ask Chiaki about this stuff.”

When they left, he was once again alone with Shuichi.

“What about you? Have you met your family?” he asked him.

“No, I only asked some questions. My parents are not… what I remember. This is so strange you know? You told me all about this earlier, but to see it in person… It’s like… all my life was a lie…” Shuichi looked a bit lost.

“No, it’s not really like that. Yuuta was the person living this life, Shuichi was living another life. That life could be technically be called a lie, but it’s your life. And we met in that life. I know it can be sad to think you have lost your parents, after all that’s what I remember too, but you have a lot of other people in your life, right?” Kokichi was somewhat bad at comforting people.

“I know, now that you are awake I’m not lonely anymore.” he smiled at him.

“Wow, you are so cheesy.”

“Shut up, you like it!” Shuichi slapped lightly his hand.

“So, where do you live right now? You have an apartment?” he asked returning serious.

“I have one, but since I’ve spent most of my time here I never got around cooking and buying stuff. So basically Amami-kun offered to cook for me. So, when I get out from here I go directly to his apartment and then I just stay there for the night.” Shuichi answered.

“I can’t believe you! You were betraying me with my Big Brother while I was sleeping!” he pouted and tried to fake some tears, that trick didn’t work in the real world. A pity.

“Yeah, of course. That’s exactly what I was doing. You got me.” his boyfriend said with nonchalance.

Kokichi laughed, weakly because he was still pretty weak, but amused. Shuichi was starting to use everything against him. Even if Kokichi loved to make him flustered and surprising him, having him fight against him from time to time was exciting just as much.

The next day, Kokichi had his first rehab therapy and he tried to walk for a bit with very poor results. He sent away Shuichi with an excuse because he didn’t want to look so uncool in front of him. During lunch, Kazuichi and Byakuya came to visit him.

Kazuichi patted him on the shoulder and started to narrate about a lot of machines he had disassembled. Kokichi could clearly feel that Kazuichi was happy to see him again. Internally, he was melting at the thought. Meeting with Rantaro had been easy after his visit in the Neo World Program, all the others after him were the ones he had spent the less amount of time with, out of all people. He had yet to see someone like Fuyuhiko, Sonia or even Momo-idiot. He was really scared they were avoiding him on purpose. Well, Momo-idiot had a point, just like Gonta and Iruma-chan, but if Gundham was avoiding him, he could actually cry.

Byakuya, in the meantime, was standing a bit further back, not really interacting with them. Kokichi knew very little of the guy but he was still grateful he showed up. Byakuya noticed him staring.
“Even if we barely know each other, it’s a relief to see that you are all in one piece,” he said with his presumptuous voice. “And I’m grateful for all you did in there, but don’t expect me to call you Leader, Ouma.”

“How are you grateful at all… You could at least add –san to my last name!” he was just trying to annoy him.

“I’m older than you.” he retorted with a smirk.

“So? I’m more amazing than you!” Kokichi raised his eyebrows with an air of superiority.

“All right, all right, this is enough. Stop fighting you two!” Kazuichi intervened.

“Kazu-chan, are the others…” Kokichi stopped himself. He didn’t want to force people who didn’t want to see him to come by asking about them. “The others of this season, are they all out of the hospital?”

“Yeah, even the last ones were discarded two weeks ago. I think they are all at the complex. The little Magician is with Tenko, the Astronaut and the Assassin are together, all the others have a single apartment. Miu, Gonta, Shinguji… As far as I know, only Ryoma, Kirumi and Angie have gone back home.”

“I see…” he didn’t want to see any of the three that had gone home, so it was no big deal. “But even after the end of the season are we all allowed to keep the apartment?” he asked Byakuya.

“Normally you are allowed to keep the apartment until you are of age… But this time it may not go so conveniently. We discussed this and we concluded that the monetary prize for the three winners of V2 is not enough to cover for all of you… Basically, we can’t decide who will get an apartment with that money and who won’t. Unfortunately the V3 monetary prize was entirely given to Kiibo, so…”

“Wait, Kiibo was an actual person?” Kokichi asked, surprised.

“Of course, why would you think any differently?”

“But… he was a robot and he didn’t get killed by the poison!” not to mention his ‘inner voice’ thing.

“Well, that was just his character. I don’t get why you would think he was not a person, Amami asked the same thing. None of you considered the fact that putting an actual robot was not only useless, but very unfair to the audience who would play with one less character in the pool? Seriously…” he sighed dramatically. No, actually Kokichi had not thought that far ahead. “Maybe he had a point when he kept saying that you are all robophobic.” True… He had ignored him because he was so hung up on his theory… “His name is Idabashi Makoto by the way. Just in case, you want to search for him. He had gone back home immediately after he was discarded. He said something about have never being appreciated anywhere or something.”

Shortly after that, he left saying he had a job interview to attend. Kokichi and Kazuichi chatted for the rest of the day. The guy was overly enthusiastic as always.

“So, have you finally found a girlfriend?”

“Not you too!” Kazuichi whimpered. “Every single person always asks me the same thing! Since that was broadcast on TV, all the girls now laugh behind my back!”

Kokichi was finally able to do his signature laugh again and put it immediately in good use.
“Nishishi! Don’t worry Kazu-chan, I’m sure you’ll find a nice girl someday! I mean, I was able to find the cute boy I was searching for, so for you this should be a breeze!” he smiled brightly.

“Yeah, right, whatever, no one understands me…” he whimpered a bit more.

When he and Shuichi were left alone, Kokichi asked one question he had in mind for quite awhile

“Have you seen Momota-chan or Harukawa-chan after the end of the season? How did they take your betrayal?” he hoped not badly.

“No, we haven’t seen each other yet… Apparently, Kaito had a real fit when he discovered that this was all fake. I… haven’t try to talk to him myself. I’m not sure of how he will react.” he sighed.

“He better welcome you or I’m going to kick him in the balls as soon as I get on my feet. And I mean… that would be a good thing for the world, to let him spread his genes around, brrrr!” he faked a shudder.

“Stop being mean!” Shuichi tried to scold him but he was fighting a chuckle so that didn’t work very well.

Kokichi was really worried about this though. Momo-idiot could say what he wanted about him, but Shuichi was innocent, well mostly, and he needed him. Kokichi was not stupid; he knew that Shuichi was different from him who didn’t need to have a lot of friends, if any at all. Shuichi could maybe feel like he was okay with having just him, but Kokichi knew better.

The next morning Chabashira-chan with the little Magician in tow came to greet him. The Aikido Master was a lot more tolerant than he remembered and she actually thanked him for having pulled out her beloved Magician away from the game. Kokichi supposed it was a blessing she was seeing it this way; she could see this as him killing her just as easily. The little girl looked a little more awkward about this, but she didn’t look angry either. He had no idea how much her friend had told her about the whole thing, but maybe she had told her enough. He waited for Shuichi to leave the room for a moment before asking her for a favor.

“Hey, can you ask everyone’s favorite Hero to come visit? His girlfriend is allowed to come too, but she is not as necessary.”

“Maybe people would be happier to help if you’d stop calling them strange names.” the girl sighed.

“All right, I’ll tell him to come, but don’t expect anything. He talked a lot with Gonta, so I have a feeling he is really not happy with you.”

“Yeah, I figured as much but this is not about me. Tell him to come because I want to talk about Shuichi.” Chabashira-chan nodded and reached the door to leave.

She was about to step out of the room when they caught Yumeno-chan staring at him and he decided to break the subject, he was not one to try and escape hate and there was no use trying to delay this any further.

“Do you want to transform me into an omnibus because I killed you?” he smiled cheerfully.

The girl jumped when she realized she was being addressed directly.

“I-I...” she was trembling a little. Kokichi was starting to feel a little bad. He was not so scary, was he? “Yeah!” suddenly, she yelled still looking anxious. “You finally recognize that I’m a mage! I-I could transform you into a cockroach and give you as a present for Gonta b-but... I guess I won’t do it b-because Shuichi would be upset!”
Yeah, sure. Whatever suited her.

“I see! I would really like to see this wonderful magic of yours, but I’ll keep in mind Shuichi’s feelings and avoid the risk of getting squashed like a bug!”

“Y-yeah!” she pointed a finger at him. “You finally get it! I’ll spare you this time!”

“Wow!” the Aikido master was making some strange noises and faces. “You are so amazing Himiko!”

The little girl ran from the room with light steps and her friend closed the door. Only after a minute Shuichi returned.

“They’re gone already?” he noticed the absence of the girls.

“Yeah. Don’t worry I apologized for you too!” he nodded with conviction.

“Somehow I doubt that, but as long as we’re all friends again it’s no big deal,” he said giving him the Panta he had asked.

This was not on his special diet for his upset stomach, but he really had to try to see if this thing was really of his liking or not. He took a long sip and tried to feel the taste as long as possible. The drink lingered in his palate for quite a while, but Kokichi could not decide if he liked it or not. He was not enjoying it, yet he wanted to take another sip. His brain was really confused. He asked Shuichi to hide the drink, so the doctor could not scold him, he was already enough of a pain in the ass as he was.

Apparently, Chabashira-chan had kept her promise: Momo-idiot and Killer Girl were inside his room the next day. Of course, he had sent Shuichi away with the excuse of buying him clothes to wear since he was getting tired of the hospital gown. He gave him with a long list of very specific requests, like a purple sweater with a hood and white capri pants, so he was sure it would take him a while. He could not be certain that these two would come today, so he had been very lucky. He would have some difficulties sending him to do some random chore every day.

“Ahh, Momota-chan and Harukawa-chan my two best friends! I’m so happy to see you two again!” he said sarcastically.

He had thought for a long while what was the best approach for this situation. He could play the victim, sure, it would probably even work, but his ethics would not let him do that. He deserved to be hated and he was not going to lie about his intention, he was not going to try and get their pity with another lie. He only wanted to shelter Shuichi.

“Even out here you are still the same annoying bastard.” Miss Killer was not going to beat around the bush.

“And you are still behaving like a killer, even though you now know that you are actually just a regular girl!” that earned him a murdering glare.

“You don’t feel any remorse for having killed us all, do you?” her voice was low and dangerous.

“You seem very much alive to me.” he answered with nonchalance.

“So that’s it. You knew about all this and just decided to play with our lives and feelings like toys.” she took a menacing step toward his bed. “That’s what you did with Gonta and Miu and then with us.”
Kokichi wanted to answer ‘Like you even care about anyone other than you and Momo-idiot!’ but refrained. He was going to take the entire blame, so they could accept the situation and Shuichi without too many problems.

“Well, yeah, it was a game so I played. That’s all. And really, we’re all alive, so there is no need to sweat about any of this, right? Stop being such a stick in the mud and start to enjoy life more! What I did was barely wrong at all!” he shrugged.

Killer Girl took another step toward him, emanating a murderous aura that didn’t scare him at all. This was the real world, she could not attack him, no matter what. As she was about to take another one Momota-cha extended an arm in front of her stopping her in her tracks.

“Listen, what happened in there at this point barely matter, what I’m more concerned about is what are you doing with Shuichi.” ah, there it was. The core of the situation. This was never about Kokichi, this conversation was for Shuichi’s sake only. Kokichi didn’t need forgiveness from these two. “I’ve seen the footage. Romeo and Juliet? What a nice act you put on display! But we both know you are not capable of loving anyone, so stay away from him from now on!”

Ouch. Not undeserved or necessarily wrong, but still ouch. But he could not choose to ‘stay away from him’ for both, Shuichi had a say in all this and they were not going to take it away.

“I’m afraid that depends entirely on what Shuichi wants.” he shrugged again, trying to look unconcerned. “He is not your property, he is his own person, and he can decide on his own what he wants.”

“Not when he is being lead astray by someone like you! Shuichi is a good guy who fights for his friends and helps everyone survive. Even during Gonta’s case, it’s always been like this and I trust him. He taught me a valuable lesson about what’s the right order of priorities. He is not the type of person to kill someone, no matter what. And now, you are telling that he did what he did of his own free will? As if I’m going to believe that! The world is big, hopefully I’ll never see you again, but you are not seeing Shuichi ever again either!” his voice in the real world sounded just a bit less angry than in the Neo World Program.

“Where were you exactly after you woke up? Shuichi told me you never talked to him.” and that was inexcusable, especially since now he was saying all these things.

“Don’t you try to guilt trip me! Amami was the one that stopped me! Saying that Shuichi was weak and needed rest! He never even used his apartment! You two are keeping him hidden in here, aren’t you?! I should have known not to trust someone that was on the same season as you! He is clearly helping you ruin Shuichi!”

Now, this was news to Kokichi. So Rantaro told them he could not receive visitors and then hid him inside his apartment without telling them? Is this what Kokichi was supposed to get from this conversation? Maybe Rantaro was trying to protect Shuichi from the accusations of those two. Or maybe he was afraid that Shuichi would change his mind before he could wake up, who knows.

“He really was weak, he is not muscle for brain like you, and the long immobility had affected him of course. And you really think he is not capable of going where he wants, when he wants? If he has not gone to his apartment yet, it’s his own business, not yours, I’m not keeping him anywhere. Can’t you see for yourself? He is not even here right now, is he?”

“Surely Amami hid him somewhere and-“

“Do I look like a box to you?”
A voice from the doorway interrupted him mid-sentence. The three of them turned to see Shuichi with two bags on each of his hands. Kokichi recognized, from somewhere deep in his brain, the brand of cloths that was printed on the bags. Shuichi calmly walked to the visitor seat and dropped the bags on it, while the others were not sure of how to react, then he turned to face Momota-chan.

“Amami-kun didn’t hide me anywhere; I was out doing some shopping. And I can’t say I see why I would need to hide in the first place.”

“Bro, it’s fine, drop it. Now let’s go, please, there are things I want to tell you.” Momota-chan tried his best to stay calm.

“There is nothing you may want to tell me that you can’t tell right here.” Kokichi was a bit impressed; Shuichi’s tone was not aggressive but calm, yet it had a certain note of firmness in it.

Momota-chan looked between Kokichi and Shuichi for a bit, his jaw shut really tight.

“Shuichi, I’m not mad for anything that happened during the season, let’s just throw that behind our backs, okay? There is no need for you to stay here any longer, let’s just go back to the complex and talk, like the old times, yes?” he tried to smile and failed.

“Sorry but no, I’ll go back to the complex later tonight, we can talk then. And Kaito, I chose to be here. I’m not here because I need to be.”

“You do realize that he was trying to save us all by concluding the season and trying to shut down Danganronpa, yes?” now Shuichi was getting on the defensive.

“No, I don’t see it. He could have told us and he had no need to drag Gonta into this at all! The poor guy still doesn’t understand what’s going on! He is still defending that bastard! Nowhere in the footage can I see him doing anything that was not selfish. And dragging you into it, of all people, is not a thing I’m willing to forgive. Let’s go Shuichi. Please!”

The two stared at each other while Kokichi’s stomach was hurting.

“Anyway,” he tried to shift the tension on him again, “I think we can all agree that Shuichi is perfectly capable of taking decisions for himself, he is not a kid. He said he’ll talk to you later tonight so just go and—“

“I’m sorry if you are disappointed with my choice, but this is my place now Kaito.” Shuichi interrupted him still staring into the guy’s eyes. “If you can accept this, then we are good. I’m not asking you to become his friend if you really hate him that much, but I’m not going to let go of his hand just because you don’t like him. I’m perfectly capable of handling myself. I’m grateful for everything you did for me, truly, but that doesn’t mean I don’t have my right to chose and even to make mistakes. I’m sorry if this is a disappointment to you Kaito, but Kokichi is my boyfriend and things are going to stay this way until I decide otherwise.”

Silence filled the room. Kokichi’s heart was beating fast, that declaration had been so… final. There was no way of countering that. Harukawa-chan sighed and pulled her boyfriend’s sleeve.

“Let’s go. I don’t think there is much to be done here.” she looked at Kokichi, but this time the stare was almost resigned. “While I still hate and I’ll probably hate him forever… I never believed that Shuichi was brainwashed. This was clearly his choice, so you either accept it or you don’t. Just
remember what happened the last time your temper got the best of you.”

And with that, she dragged him out of the room. Kokichi was really surprised, he would have never expected to receive an unexpected assist from her. Shuichi sighed when the door closed and sat on his bed.

“Look, I got you the clothes you asked for!” he started to search through the bags.

“I’m sorry.”

“For what?” he asked without stopping looking inside of the bag.

“For having ruined your friendship with Momota.” he avoided the -chan this time.

“You didn’t do anything, I did it all by myself.”

“No, that’s not true, if I’d never proposed the plan to you—“

“Kokichi, don’t. Just… don’t. Why don’t you try this on instead? I need to know if it’s the right size!”

They spent the evening trying on all the clothes he had bought. Kokichi was moving very slowly, so every piece was taking a very long while. He left the purple sweater with the hood for last, when he tried it on it was like going back home. He almost wanted to cry.

The next day, Kokichi immediately started the day by wearing his new sweater, even if it was summer. He wore this on a tropical island, a normal summer was nothing! And this turned out to be the right decision because his visitors were surely ones that he wanted to be seen in the same way as the old times. Fuyuhiko, Sonia and Gundham smiled when they saw him sitting on his bed with his legs dangling down, licking a purple lollypop Shuichi had bought him in secret. The doctor could say whatever he wanted, but Kokichi was not going to stay this long without having anything sweet.

“Yo, Leader. Already up to mischief, I see!” Fuyuhiko shook hands with him.

“My, it is such a pleasure to see you again, Leader!” Sonia has still that strange accent and she was still behaving like royalty.

“Khehe! I see that not even the Dark Void of Lethe could prevent your piercing aura from flowing through the Veil of Death! You have successfully acquired the ability to travel between the Barriers of Miasma and come out unscratched!” and Gundham was still Gundham, thanks to all the gods, well except Atua. Screw Atua.

Kokichi was absolutely elated to see them, of course playing favorites was bad, but there was no way he would not feel more connected to the people he had survived till the end of the 52nd season. Kokichi showered them with questions about everything, and hearing the different kind of responses. One of them was answering being all sassy, the other talking all in proper language and the last one by sprouting some random words and names that were hardly even coherent. Kokichi loved them all so much. Of course, these were not all the people he loved, he loved Rantaro and Kazuichi as well, and Chiaki and somehow even Nagito. He had missed them all so incredibly much. Kokichi would have never thought he would be so attached to someone.

Of course, Shuichi was another matter entirely. Shuichi was unique.

“So, Leader, you better get on your feet as soon as possible, I have a lot of things to discuss with you! I want to remind you that you still owe me a toast with water!” Fuyuhiko grinned.
“Yeah, and you have to come and visit our pomeranian, I’m sure you’ll love it.” Sonia joined her hand.

“Khehe! I’ve found an apothecary that sells ingredients for the forbidden ritual!” Gundham crossed his arms with a smile.

“Nishishi, sounds great! By the way, I get to name the pomeranian right? Since I’m the Leader!” he waved his lollypop around.

“H-um, sure…?” Sonia was a bit perplexed.

“Well then! I officially name him DICE, and he will be my second in command from now on, any objection?” he pointed the lollypop at her.

“I guess…” she smiled. “Will you give him a checkered scarf as well?”

“Of course! I’m re-founding the nonexistent DICE! You are all members in it! Shuichi is my wife and DICE is my second in command and representative. Then there are all of you who are my underlings!”

“Who is your wife supposed to be, Juliet?” Shuichi intervened with sarcasm from his position on the visitor seat.

“Shut up Romeo-chan! It’s absolutely clear to everyone who is the alpha male here!” he pointed the lollypop at him next.

“Sure, alpha male, sure.” Shuichi grinned a little from the book he was reading.

“What?! Are you questioning my masculinity? It seems I still need to show you just how much—“

“Yeah, I think you’d better show whatever when you two are alone, yes?” Fuyuhiko interrupted.

“Oh yeah, better not to shock the little kid.” Kokichi crossed his legs looking superior.

“I’m not a kid!”

“Hm-hm. Did you ever get past the holding hand phase with Peko?” he placed his lollypop in his mouth and grinned.

“S-shut up, we get along just fine!” Fuyuhiko yelled, becoming all red.

“Hm-hm, speaking of people who get along. Sonia and Gundham, got past the holding hand phase?” he removed the lollypop again.

“I-I dunno what are you talking about.” Gundham answered in hurry, using his normal tone. He was all red as well and looked away. The guy was not capable of lying at all.

“Ohhh! I want the details!” he yelled obnoxiously.

“Hmm, how should I put this, that is kind of…” Sonia was hesitant.

“Ehh? C’mon!” Kokichi had just finished yelling that Shuichi hit him lightly in the head with the book.

“Stop it.” and that closed the discussion.
Later, when they were gone, Kokichi asked Shuichi if he wanted to help him with the shower so to prove his manliness, but Shuichi refused, saying to stop messing around inside a hospital. And he was trying to doubt the fact that Kokichi was the alpha male of the relationship, pfft.

The next day was the time to confront the visit he was fearing the most: Gonta and Iruma-chan. The fact that they arrived together was rather peculiar. He was really surprised the girl was willingly spending time with the person that strangled her to death.

“Yo, dickhead! So you didn’t die, ah? A pity.” was her greeting.

Not that Kokichi was hoping for anything different.

“Oh, my favorite whore! And here I thought I had killed you… A pity.” he reciprocated in full.

“Keh! Don’t lie! I already know that Rantaro was the one that did all the work, you are just a little fly riding on his glory!” she put her hands on her hips.

He was what? Rantaro did what? What the hell had he told her? Well, whatever.

“Yeah, that’s right. This is all Rantaro’s accomplishment!” he smiled.

“Keh! I knew it!” she looked completely satisfied for some reason.

“Eh?! Really?! Rantaro killed Miu?!” Gonta panicked instantly.

“No, bugs for brain! You killed me, but Rantaro was the one that made it possible!” she contradicted him puffing her chest.

“Oh! Gonta see!” he smiled, relaxed again.

Kokichi was beyond confused. What kind of story had those two decided to tell themselves to cover for all this? Not that he was going to complain if they were happy with that.

“So, little dick, that was quite a show you decided to put up! Have you two fucked yet?!” she asked with her usual obnoxious voice.

“Of course! A bunch of times in all positions!” he answered cheerfully.

He heard Shuichi cough in the background.

“I somehow doubt that.” she said with an air of superiority.

“Gonta thinks Kokichi and Shuichi are cute together!” luckily, the guy was completely oblivious to what they were talking about.

Kokichi was keeping up with them, but he was feeling increasingly restless. Were they going to act like nothing had happened forever? Should he do that too? Was he even allowed to? Kokichi was guilty, there was no way that forgetting that was the right thing to do. But then what? Kokichi decided to try to pry an answer directly out of them.

“So…. Are you here to kill me and get your revenge?” he placed a finger on his lips.

“No thank you. I just had my manicure done.” she stared at her nails unconcerned.

“Ehh?! Why would Gonta do that?!” he looked totally concerned but for all the wrong reasons.
“Because I made you kill of course!” Kokichi was already aware he had to spell it out for him.

“Oh, no, Gonta sad that Gonta killed Miu, but Gonta learned lesson. Gonta learned everything about TV shows. Gonta knows that he killed only because of TV show.” he clenched his fits in frustration.

“Yeah, and you better not forget that! No killing, ever again!” she ordered him.

“Yeah, Gonta not make the same mistake again!” and with that the topic was dropped again.

Kokichi was pretty stunned, he knew Gonta was easy to manipulate, unfortunately, but he never thought it could work so well to make him convince that Kokichi was not the scum of the Earth. Not that Kokichi was going to delude himself that he was not, whatever Gonta had decided to believe, and Kokichi was not going to try to change his mind, that could not change reality of facts.

“See, they’re cool with you.” said Shuichi gently, after they had left.

“Yeah well… I’m not sure either of them have enough brain to actually understand the gravity of the situation, but I guess I should be grateful for that.” Kokichi looked away.

“Don’t say stuff like that. Gonta may not be bright but he definitely knows what happened. And Miu is the type to keep a grudge for life.” Shuichi stroked his hair. “If they wanted you to apologize, I would have been on their side, since I think you should’ve apologized but if they’d rather keep things like this then you need to do the same. Always remember what happened and how that made you feel, so never, in the future, you’ll be tempted into doing it again.”

“Shuichi… I want to go home.” Shuichi bowed his head a little to help him get eye contact. “I dunno where home is supposed to be, maybe your apartment, or mine, whatever. I just… need some space, and to breath fresh air, and to move around as I please. I need to see this new world. You understand?”

Shuichi remained silent only for a moment.

“Yes.” he broke eye contact, like he was a bit embarrassed by what he was about to say and couldn’t look at him in the eyes. “We don’t need two separate apartments… I don’t think. You can just stay with me. If you’d like of course!” he looked in a hurry to stop talking.

Kokichi’s heart skipped a beat. Was he for real?

“Nishishi! I would’ve never thought you would ask me to marry you so soon! Saihara-chan you perv! Are you in such a hurry to get in my pants?!” he grinned.

The two red spots on his cheeks were the only answer he got from him. He didn’t need anything else.

Negotiating with the doctor for his anticipated released had not been easy. Kokichi fought with him and Shuichi tried to reason with him for a full two days before Rantaro butted in and solved the situation in a flash. Kokichi still had to understand exactly what had gotten into him. Heck, he looked much more like a Leader than him now! Rantaro proposed to help them with some shopping so the apartment could be ready for when he would be discharged. Of course, Kokichi ordered him to buy every kind of sweet and snack. And of course, Rantaro didn’t even listen and said he would buy a lot of vegetables. Kokichi spent the last day in the hospital being absolutely insufferable, even Shuichi was taking breaks from him. He gave his utter best to rehab, but unfortunately walking for a distance was still beyond him, so Shuichi proposed to get Gonta to help, since Kokichi immediately grimaced when the doctor proposed a wheelchair to reach at least the taxi. Kokichi didn’t want to rely on the big guy anymore, for his sake more than his own, but he sucked it up and agreed.
The day finally arrived for him to leave and Gonta appeared just in time looking like he was in high
spirit. He grabbed the bag where Kokichi had stuffed his clothes and the other things Shuichi had
bought him and then crouched down so he could give Kokichi a piggyback ride. If he had been
alone, he would have pressed him to carry him princess style but since Shuichi was watching, he
stored the idea in the back of his mind for another occasion. Before grabbing on Gonta, he reached
the place where he had hidden the Panta bottle, now empty, and left it in the center of the bed.

“What are you doing?” asked Shuichi raising an eyebrow.

“Leaving the doctor a present! As a thank you for having taken such a good care of me!” he smiled
brightly.

“You are leaving him trash.” Shuichi sighed shaking his head. “You are just as ridiculous as ever.”

“Nishishi!”

Kokichi jumped on Gonta, the guy didn’t even wobble a little. As sturdy as a rock, even in the real
world. Kokichi pointed a finger to the hallway.

“Onward! To adventures! Geronimooooo!” he yelled.

The dramatic effect was ruined thanks to Gonta looking at him with his head tilted, confused. He
heard Shuichi chuckle behind his back.

“Go! C’mon, go!” that was not even nearly as epic but at least it worked.

With every step that Gonta took towards the exit of the hospital, Kokichi felt like he could breath
more deeply, like the air was suddenly growing in quantity. That was, of course, very stupid, but
Kokichi loved the feeling of breathing brand new air for the first time. As Takumi he surely breathed
a lot of it, but as Kokichi this was the first experience of fresh air he ever breathed. He had been born
into this world, but now he was being born again.

When the sun hit him, he was momentarily blinded. He remembered the sun, of course, but this
warmth was completely different from the one in the Neo World Program. Looking around, he saw
buildings and heard noises. The world outside was big, extensive, vast. And scary.

He had known every nook and cranny of the Academy for Gifted Juveniles, but now he was in a
much bigger world he knew nothing of. It was very scary. In this world, Kokichi was no Leader. He
was no genius. He was just a kid. A little kid that damaged a colossal brand and probably nobody
liked. He saw Shuichi observing him. No, who Kokichi was in this world was a problem for
tomorrow. Today, Kokichi was still a Leader. Today, Kokichi was still Shuichi’s boyfriend.

They rode the taxi and Kokichi stared out of the window the whole time with his nose glued to the
glass. He didn’t want to lose even a detail. For that reason, he was the first one to see them. Chiaki
and a guy he had never seen before. She smiled when she saw him staring at her. He smiled back,
waving a hand a little.

“Hello Leader. It’s nice to see you again.” Chiaki greeted him with her usual sweet voice once they
had left the vehicle. “This is Hinata Hajime. My boyfriend. Perhaps you have heard of him?”

“Yo, Chi-chan! He is one of the ones that saved my ass. Sure! Nice to meet you, Hinata Hajime-
chan! The other, Mitarai Ryota-chan, is not around? I would have liked to meet him as well.”
Kokichi was aware that he was taking too much liberty there; both Hinata Hajime and Mitarai Ryota
were older than he was and were more distinctive than he was. But he could not back down so
easily, could he? He was still supposed to be a very forward person.
“Nice to meet you Ouma-kun. Ryota is at home, he went visit Nagito earlier and gave me this for you.” Hinata handed him a piece of paper.

“Oh! How is Naginagi-chan doing? Still riding on his bullshit?” he said taking the paper.

He was a bit disappointed he could not tease the real deal.

“Yeah, even more than before, if possible. He is doing fine… I guess.” Hinata shrugged and smiled a bit sadly.

Kokichi opened the paper and inside were only two sentences.

\[
\text{The problem when you are chasing something}
\]
\[
\text{that’s brighter than you is that you have to use}
\]
\[
\text{as a comparison the mediocre and the bad. I tried}
\]
\[
\text{to forget that, for once, and I got blinded.}
\]

Kokichi closed the paper without a word and hid it in his pocket.

“What does it say?” asked Shuichi, not really sure he was allowed to.

“Oh, nothing, just some of his usual bullshit, nice to see he didn’t change a tiny little bit.”

“Shall we go in? I have the key to your apartment Kokichi.” proposed Chiaki.

“No, I’m going to live with boyfriend-chan and then I’m going to marry him, and adopt ten children and then, when they are fat enough, I’m going to eat them for dinner,” he said with a completely serious tone.

“Sounds fascinating, okay, so you don’t need the key and the apartment? Are you sure?” Chiaki asked.

“Are you trying to jinx my relationship by saying that I need to keep the key for when we will break up, Chi-chan?”

“Not at all. It’s a good idea anyway, the Danganronpa team is not very happy with you, I’m afraid they would use any kind of excuse to not pay for you. You two better share the apartment, so they will have fewer pretenses to kick you out.”

“See, Saihara-chan! You can’t kick me out ‘cause I’ll be homeless so you have to keep me even if you hate me! It’s a great deal!” he made a victory sign to him and Shuichi smiled sighing.

“We are going to give you a hand getting settled, let’s go in.” Hinata redirected the conversation on tracks.

Gonta carried Kokichi up the stairs and they stopped in front of a door on the fourth floor.

“Amami-kun and your other friends live on the third floor; we arrived later so we are living in the fourth.” Shuichi explained to him.

Shuichi opened the door with his key and they all entered. Kokichi immediately found a sofa and sat down watching the others working. Of course, he was tired and still a bit weak and so it was obvious he would just sit, but if anyone had any questions, he would answer that a Leader makes others work
for him. At some point Chiaki and Hinata left with some unclear explanation, something about buying supplies, but Kokichi was pretty sure it was bullshit. Shuichi sat next to him.

“So… home?” Kokichi asked.

“Yeah, I guess. If you like it. For now, at least. In the future, we will see. Why are you calling me Saihara-chan again?”

“Because, Shuichi, this is for when we are alone only! I’m calling you nicknames with others around, you better resign yourself to it!” he placed a finger on his lips seductively.

“Oh… I see…” he looked at a loss for words for a moment, then he seemed to change the mood.

“By the way, your friends are preparing a surprise party for you, that’s why they are gone. They are in Amami-kun’s apartment, preparing decorations and food.”

“Ohh? And you just decided to spoil the surprise?” Kokichi raised his eyebrows.

“Honestly, I don’t agree with this idea. You have just left the hospital and the doctor told you to rest. Having a party with more than twenty people is not what I call rest.”

“Ohh, Mommy, that’s so nice of you! Since Toujo-chan took off for who knows where, now you are my new mom! I think I already mention that I’m not into that fantasy, but if you are so into it I guess I’ll allow it.” no, that was a lie.

He really appreciated Shuichi being concerned about him, but at the same time, Kokichi was not the type of person to let others decide for him. He disliked motherly personalities. Everyone had to respect his space. Even Shuichi, best boyfriend.

“Kokichi…” he sighed.

“Alright, let’s go with this. I promise not to get up from this sofa, they can open the gate of Pandaemonium in the middle of the living room and I’m not going to do anything, you deal with it. What do you think?” he stared up at his face with a little smile, offering his compromise.

“Oh, I can work with that.” Shuichi moved his hair from his eyes and kissed his forehead, blushing only a little bit.

Kokichi was going to miss the exaggerate blushes that were inside the Neo World Program. Shuichi was a bit easier to read in there, probably because inside the program they wanted to help the audience understand what they were thinking. He had to get used to the real world all over again.

The door opened and voices filled the entrance.

“They are here. Ready to be a Leader again?” Shuichi asked, smiling.

“Ready or not, here they come.”

Chapter End Notes

I just want to thank you all, nothing more, nothing less!
It’s been a very fulfilling journey, I’ve grown so much as a person.
And if you want… you can keep on eye out for the near future…
Please drop by the archive and comment to let the author know if you enjoyed their work!