The Sound of Silence

by gen

Summary

Klavier Gavin's world used to be nothing but lights and sounds. Growing up in the spotlight, he'd grown comfortable in the constant noise. He's had to watch slowly, steadily, as each source of noise faded into nothing. The last source, a short, quick-tempered defense attorney, left him in a deafening silence. Forced to stare into the abyss, he's left with one question from which the noise distracted him:

Who is Klavier Gavin? And, more importantly, what does he want?

Notes
People you know, on your side, touching concern
Stand on a chair and scream as the tables turn
Take a bow, take the blame, soon you'll wake up screaming your nightmare's name...

See the end of the work for more notes.
In Black and White

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Klavier Gavin stared into the mirror in front of him, eyes bloodshot and dark circles etched into the sallow skin around his nose and under his eyebrows. His hair, which he’d loosed from the ponytail only moments prior, had fallen over his shoulders in a loose curl. He hadn’t showered in days. Considering he’d spent the past months going between daily showers that scorched his skin (and left his bathroom humid for hours) and weeks without bathing, he figured he was doing pretty well. Three days wasn’t so terrible. It wasn’t like he’d been using product to keep it styled, anyway. No, his hair would go straight from the towel to a ponytail, and most often he pulled a baseball cap pulled low over his eyes. He’d seen his reflection staring back at himself before, but never with so much…Well, angst, he figured. That was the only way he could describe it. He’d dealt with angst before. That’s what led him to the Gavinners in the first place, after all; it was a refreshing way to deal with all the teenage hormones and upset from his home life. But this angst felt…different at its core. Where the Gavinners experience had served as an outlet for an unnamed anger that he couldn’t place, this had too much direction. There was so much angst this time, too much he could point to, too much about which to cry that just the thought of it overwhelmed him.

Most obviously, there was Kristoph. Ever since he’d been convicted, Klavier had tried to visit. The unfortunate side of Kristoph’s conviction, however, meant that he could agree to, or deny, any party that tried to visit. Once Klavier was announced, Kristoph would deny him access, and he’d be turned away.

He’d tried every day for three months.

Days had turned to weeks, and then weeks into months.

Leading up to his execution, Klavier had almost stopped trying. Every day, the date of his brother’s death would stare him in the face, as if he’d circled it in red ink and placed neon flashing lights on the little calendar’s square. Some days, it felt like it would never come; that Kristoph would only be locked away for the rest of his life, or his sentence would be overturned. On days like those, Klavier staring at the hardest pill he’d yet to swallow.

On the one hand, he would give anything to have his brother back. Something—anything—from his childhood. Their parents had long since passed, and when Kris had the opportunity, he’d pulled Klavier from Germany to America in a heartbeat, leaving behind any extended family. Klavier figured that whatever family they had, Kris had circumvented their communication before it reached him. That thought, and the bitterness that swept over him, always led to the other hand.

He’d spent years under Kristoph’s care. It hadn’t been long after Kristoph turned sixteen that their parents had died, and he’d done everything possible to keep them out of foster homes for the remaining two years before he turned into a legal adult. For fourteen years, it had been Klavier and Kristoph against the world, but, what Klavier struggled to come to terms with, was that it had been more ‘Kristoph and his Puppet, Klavier, Against the World’.

On those days, he figured, as much as he wanted his brother back, he was better off without a manipulative murderer in his life. He’d attended the execution, of course, but if closure was measured in money, he wouldn’t even have a penny to his name.
Without two manipulative murderers in his life, he was always reminded.

Even when Kristoph was alive, he’d always had Daryan. He’d spent countless nights on his best friend’s couch growing up, not to mention that their time at Themis had been, quite possibly, the most consistently happy time in his life. As if growing apart from childhood friends wasn’t hard enough, as they had leading up to the Tobaye trial, finding out that his best friend was a murderer on top of it all shook him to the core. The days after the Misham trial had been a harsh wake-up call.

He’d stared at his ceiling, mostly. Some days, he’d been afraid to leave the safety of his bed, tied down by the inescapable fear that someone else would turn into a monster in front of his eyes. Others, the thought of rising, striving—caring—felt too heavy to lift, and he’d simply slept the day away.

Nights following those days only strengthened his anger toward himself. He’d spent countless nights awake, aimlessly plucking at strings of his guitar, trying to find something to catch his muse. The old Gavinners songs danced in his head like cruel goblins, taunting him of a time when music acted like an escape, not just a torturous game of cat-and-mouse. Even listening to music felt like a chore; the same intro-verse-chorus-verse formula only brought back Daryan’s fear to branch out into anything unfamiliar.

Like smuggling, Klavier would think to himself, and he’d return to square one, back in his bed. When he needed to go out, he’d find some scotch or rum to help him out of the house, and go from there. He’d dragged himself to parties where—even though it only lasted for a few hours—he’d felt welcomed. Needed, even. There, he could run on autopilot and pass it off as a mellow trip; he had no need to focus on anything specific. Working had turned itself into a nightmare. Every case he took, no matter the circumstances, he’d been too timid to conduct the case the way it needed to be conducted. The fear of someone pulling powerful strings behind his back kept him frozen in a state of ‘what ifs’ and doubt. The Chief Prosecutor had quickly taken the terrified Gavin and placed him on data entry.

As much of a pain that Miles Edgeworth was, and no matter how many times Klavier tried telling him so, he was eternally grateful for the switch. Data entry had meant quiet days locked away in his office, staying out of the public light, and hours that allowed him to show up late to the office and leave long after everyone else. No one had to see him in such disarray, and no one asked questions. Even when he would show up late from a tattoo session, hardly anyone batted an eye.

He’d always wanted a sleeve, but the fear of ruining his image had kept him paralyzed in a fascination from afar. Once a year passed from Daryan and Kristoph’s case, and he still wasn’t dead, he’d taken full advantage of a good day, and rushed to a tattoo parlor. The artist, one he’d visited prior for a cover up on his hip, had given him the large pirate ship that now covered his left forearm. Herr Edgeworth had been concerned, yes, but Klavier had avoided questions his entire life. One stuffy, gray prosecutor would never break the will of someone who had grown up with the Coolest Defense in the West. For almost a year, he worked old cases, entering them into the new system Herr Edgeworth implemented to finally bring the prosecutor’s office up to date, and visited his tattoo artist to finish the grayscale piece. The routine sunk him into a numbness where, eventually, the only time he’d felt anything were his tattoo sessions, and, once the ship was complete, he’d expanded to an abstract pattern around his elbow and tricep. He’d considered seeing a shrink, but after a while, he got used to the numbness. So used to it, in fact, that he began looking at cases as a prosecutor again, not just an intern.

The change from monotony was enough to make him feel like he was finally—finally—on the up and up.
Constance Courte’s murder, however, had brought him crashing back to earth.

He’d only had a few classes with Ms. Courte in his time at Themis, but she’d left more of an impact on him than she would have ever known. As advisor to the Fine Arts Club, Klavier had spent countless afternoons perched atop one of her classroom’s desks, notebook or guitar in hand and debating the finer sides of the courtroom. She’d always pushed him to be his best, to keep striving for the next level. Her advice had been the drive to keep Klavier playing when his fingers bled, and to branch out past the guitar to any instrument he could get his hands on.

In Klavier’s adolescent world, where true reality and Kristoph’s reality were so blurred, so caught up in one another, it was Constance Courte who was always there to give the boy direction. Klavier had always wanted to do something for her, anything, to let her know her impact on him.

Reading the headline that she’d been killed, however, took the fragile stability Klavier had constructed, and shattered it against the looming wall of silence Kristoph had left in his wake.

Her murder had done some good, at least; it got Klavier out of bed without any alcoholic assistance, and back into his legal clothes (which hung on him more loosely than he remembered). Word that the Wright Anything Agency, and thus, Apollo, on the case had brought him out of his room. With everything he’d lost, the thought of adding ‘Herr Forehead’ had pulled him out of his haze and into the real world once more. In fact, it gave him a foolish hope that they might reconnect, or that he’d see the defense attorney outside the courtroom more. He’d thrown on some bronzer to try and hide his sickly complexion, and styled his hair for the first time in almost a year.

Pulling it back into the familiar twist had sickened him, but he wasn’t about to show up in front of him looking as he felt; like a forgotten, withered shadow of himself.

He’d walked into Themis with head held high, slipping back into the comfortable rockstar mask he’d constructed for moments exactly like this. He’d heard the whispers around him, but flashed the same smile. If he kept smiling brightly enough, he’d hoped that he could hide the darkness boiling within him. There was no reason that he should have to bother his last ray of sunlight with his abyss.

When he’d first laid eyes on him in a year, however, it was as if Klavier’s world of black and white had robbed him of any memory of the color red.

It did, however, look good on Apollo Justice.

Those big, brown eyes had stared at him incredulously, as if they’d seen a ghost. The moment between Klavier’s offer for help and Apollo’s flustered sputtering had felt like an eternity. The new girl, Athena, she’d introduced herself, had almost caught on to him, but he’d locked away whatever made her eyes water in his direction and decided to lay on Klavier Gavin, rockstar, even thicker.

Apollo hadn’t changed, much. He had more confidence, that was for sure, but he still carried himself nervously, and seemed to jump at any lead Klavier would give him.

Despite everything, helping out with the trial felt...comfortable. Being helpful hadn’t been something Klavier was used to in the year prior, but any assertion that he’d only been there for Professor Courte would be incomplete.

So, when Apollo’s friend was almost murdered, he found himself staring at the ugliest emotion he’d ever registered.

An anger, deep and upsetting, had taken over. He imagined this was how Kristoph felt all the time, and it scared Klavier to the bone. And along with that anger came shame, once he realized it.
He was envious that Apollo wouldn’t share in his suffering.

He remembered feeling nauseated at the realization.

It was a selfish thought; possibly the most selfish thought that had ever crossed his mind (a tall order, when dealing with a former teenage rock star). The idea that he was upset because someone wouldn’t understand his despair completely overtook him. No matter how he tried, how hard he tried to forgive the universe, or Clay, or Apollo, or whoever he was angry at, the envy returned, and with that envy, anger at himself.

And it exhausted him.

After Clay’s attempted murder, he slept. For almost two years, he went to work and slept. The parties stopped. The attempts to find a shrink stopped. The small rays of color he’d received from meeting with Apollo again vanished as quickly as they’d shown up, and he stared into a black and white pit.

What remained in Klavier Gavin’s life had been work, sleep, anger, and booze for whenever he had to drag himself out of bed.

Sure, some days were better than others. Those days he spent staring at his phone, the typed out (but never sent) invitation to Apollo staring back at him. He’d lost count of how many times he’d almost sent it. Every time, the envious, overwhelming anger would flare again, and, ashamed of himself, Klavier would delete the invitation, and throw his phone across the room. Then the spiral would happen again.

The alcohol happened slowly. At first, he would only use it to get him out of the house. Eventually, the bottles moved from the kitchen to his bedroom, and it helped him get out of bed. He’d tried justifying himself by saying that he only needed one in the morning, and then everything would be fine after that.

It usually was only one in the morning, sure, but the guilt of his dependency, added to the envy, shame, and anger, turned him into a hermit, afraid of the anger turning him into the monster that had taken over Kristoph.

When he heard of Apollo moving to Khur’ain altogether, his list was complete. He’d stared at the invitation for two years too long. Something in Klavier Gavin snapped.

He broke his work schedule for the first time in three years. The schedule by which he’d planned his life no longer mattered, because, to Klavier, nothing did. He took a look around his room, finished his first drink of the day, grabbed his baseball cap, and stormed out. He’d been so distraught that he’d forgotten any makeup, and had walked into the middle of a Los Angeles summer in baggy jeans, black hoodie, and tank top.

He’d been unsure what he was going to do. Stop Apollo’s plane? Confess that he’d been avoiding him because he was too ashamed to face him, but wanted to see him anyway? Yell from the rooftops that he wasn’t okay, and that he needed help?

No, he was Klavier Gavin. Klavier Gavin stared at the words ‘I’m Fine’ with the same longing a lit candle stares at a strong breeze.

The familiar disheveled mess stared back at him in the mirror, and he pursed his lips together. Klavier Gavin didn’t feel despair; he’d just have to press on.

“…Mr. Gavin?” The woman behind him asked for the third time, and suddenly, Klavier was hyper
aware of the cape snapped too tightly around his neck and the uncomfortable vinyl pressing into his back where the tank top and hoodie were riding up. He was sweating; whatever sorry excuse for an air conditioner the salon was using was out of date. His sandaled feet readjusted on the foot rest, and finally, ice blue eyes turned from themselves to the woman. She was average in height, blond hair styled into a messy beehive. “Are you sure about this?”

Klavier looked from the razor in her hand and back to his hair.

He was sick of seeing Kristoph staring back at him whenever his hair was down.

“Ja, Fraülein. All of it.”

Chapter End Notes

tumblr
playlist
aesthetic
Hopeless

Chapter Summary

Silent I go under,
I am not afraid.
I can see the daylight shine,
And slowly drift away...

Chapter Notes

Oh boy, hi everyone from the ace attorney universe i've been so meaning to get back to for...ever...
I played through spirit of justice, and listen, i have a lot of feelings about klavier gavin. It's...kind of safe to say that my jojo's fic is on break for the foreseeable future. I do have every intention of finishing it, but i cranked the first two of these out in two days and...it's safe to say this has been waiting for me to write it for almost a year. So. Here goes nothing.
As always, lemme know what you think! I'm always open to nerding out about lawyers on my tumblr.

Miles Edgeworth stared at the man in front of him for a moment, speechless. It had been at least three weeks since the last time he’d seen Prosecutor Gavin, but he was positive that, the last time they interacted, the man had…more hair.

Benching Prosecutor Gavin had been both a blessing and a curse for the Chief Prosecutor. Sure, Gavin was one of their best legal minds, but ever since Kristoph’s true nature had come to light, trying to get the younger of the Gavin brothers to work with any sort of confidence had felt like pulling teeth.

For a man who seemed to exude confidence wherever he went, Edgeworth’s decision had been quick and easy. At least Gavin was still a good worker, and he’d been doing wonders for their file backup process.

Ever since Blackquill’s release, however, something had felt…off.

Now, Edgeworth sat with teacup in hand, staring over his desk at the man in front of him. His curtains had been pulled aside in the late afternoon to let in all the natural light possible, but now as the afternoon was turning into evening, the street lights below looked almost as though they were casting shadows on the man’s face. As Edgeworth struggled to find some words to say, as he had for the past few months, the teacup felt heavier and heavier.

He took a measuring sip, not breaking eye contact with Klavier.

“That’s a new style,” he commented, and it took Klavier a moment before he reached up and
subconsciously touched the remaining tufts of blonde. Whatever had happened to the rest of it, Edgeworth figured, it had been recent. A few strands of long hair stuck to his shoulders, and every time he moved his head, some smaller strands fell from more stable roots.

“Ja,” Klavier reluctantly admitted. He reached up as if to fidget with the right side of his face, as he always did, but when he found a much shorter strand in its place, his face flushed, and he pushed it back out of his face with a sheepish blush. “I know it’s not professional, Herr Edgeworth…”

“It’s fine,” Edgeworth brushed it off, setting down his teacup. “Is this why you wanted to see me so late?”

“N-no,” Gavin muttered, desperately searching for words. Edgeworth’s brow quirked. Normally, he would have denied such a late visit, but it was an appointment he’d meant to make himself for a few weeks. He’d sent Trucy a quick apology text shortly after receiving the email from the man in front of him; her pot pies were one of his favorite dinners. “It is not about the hair.”

“Very well,” he crossed his hands on the desk in front of him. “What is this about?”

“Herr Edgeworth, I…” Gavin measured his words. He felt like he was drowning? Had to have alcoholic assistance to get out of bed? Constantly felt the need to drive his motorcycle into the sunset and start over?

Now **that** was an idea.

Feeling his own stupidity, Klavier flashed a grin at the man. “I should have prepared more for this meeting, I apologize.”

“Nonsense,” Edgeworth waved a dismissive hand. “Have a seat.”

Giving Edgeworth a grateful smile, Klavier took the offered seat and placed his hands on his knees.

“Herr Edgeworth, I must confess…” he started, pressing his nails into the soft flesh of his palms. “I…am not well.”

Careful not to comment on the obvious statement, Edgeworth simply nodded.

“I would like to request a leave of absence,” Klavier continued. “I…I have some things I need to sort out.”

*Some things?* Gross understatement, but it was all Klavier could do to get out of bed in the first place.

“That’s understandable,” Edgeworth nodded to himself, and Klavier looked back up at his boss. “Everything with your brother, Mr. Crescend, Professor Courte…”

“Thank you for summarizing my pain,” Klavier added dryly, and Edgeworth stopped himself, pursing his lips together. A new emotion colored his face from a cool indifference to…pity? Klavier bristled. He could deal with a lot of emotions, but **pity**—

*Nein*, he thought to himself, taking another look into the gray irises. They held something…different than pity. Something deeper. Klavier watched the Chief Prosecutor for a moment, trying to place the expression. Eyebrows quirked, aged eyes, pursed lips…

It was empathy.
Klavier felt his anger subside, and he took a deep breath.

“Herr Edgeworth,” he continued. “I appreciate all you have done for me the past few years, but—,”

“Some things cannot be fixed just by repetitive paperwork,” Edgeworth held up a hand in understanding. “Prosecutor Gavin, I understand completely.” He removed the glasses from the bridge of his nose to look at the younger man closer. “To be frank, I am surprised that this wasn’t brought up two years ago.”

Klavier flushed again. When he’d first been moved back to his desk instead of filed work, he’d known that Edgeworth had something to say to him, but it wasn’t until right now that he understood how deep the empathy ran.

“So…”

“Of course your leave of absence is granted,” the older of the two sat back in his chair and waved a hand in Gavin’s direction. “Taking care of yourself is—and should always be—your first priority.”

“Thank you—,”

“If you need assistance in finding a therapist, our Human Resources department could surely help.”

“I…don’t think that will be necessary,” Klavier slumped, crossed his arms over his chest, and stared out the window behind Edgeworth like a petulant child. “I have never had luck with those doctors.”

“I understand your trepidation, but I do believe that good can come out of it,” he offered. Klavier grimly spread his hands out in front of him, fixing Edgeworth with an almost-desperate smile.

“Perhaps,” he agreed, “but right now….I just need space.”

“I understand,” the older nodded, and turned back to his tea. “Would you like some?” He asked, and Klavier took a moment to register the question.

“Ja, sure,” he shrugged. If this would be the last day spent in the prosecutor’s office, he might as well make the most of it.

Not to mention that it had been a solid three years since someone offered him anything so genuinely.

Edgeworth stood, turned away from the desk, and pulled another cup and saucer from the windowsill’s set. He quickly wiped out any dust with a small napkin, and filled the space with tea instead. He was grateful for the opportunity to turn away from the other man. Usually, Edgeworth prided himself on his cool demeanor, but, as Wright liked to point out every so often, he would break that demeanor in order to find the right words to say. He’d never been particularly gifted with any sort of condolences, but he’d seen too much of his old self in Klavier’s recent condition…he couldn’t let this opportunity pass without offering something. He turned back to Klavier with outstretched hand. Klavier dumbly stared at it, unsure what to do for a moment, before he remembered his manners, and took the offering. Edgeworth quickly filled his own once more, discarded the leaves, and sat back in his desk chair.

Silence hung in the room as the two prosecutors sipped their green tea. The faint smell of strawberries, from the tea, filled Klavier’s nose, and he took a moment to relish his current state. The scent, the feeling of the warm liquid hitting the bottom of his stomach, and the silent, unnamed but still strong emotion from Edgeworth wrapped him in a moment of security.

For a moment, the anxieties that trapped him in a worried cocoon seemed to dissipate. His shoulders
relaxed for the first time in months.

Edgeworth let the moment drag on for a moment before he broke the silence.

“I can offer you the days you’ve yet to take off since you started working,” he offered, and Klavier raised his head. “This is your tenth year as a prosecutor, yet you’ve taken almost no vacation time. That’s around two hundred days, Gavin.”

“I… I’m not sure if I’ll be back after that,” Klavier murmured into his cup, and Edgeworth softened all the more.

“Please don’t mistake me,” he set down his tea as the man opposite him took another sip. “I’m not saying that I will mandate you to return after that time. I’m simply stating… I can only pay you for that time.”

Klavier’s stomach dropped, and he raised his eyebrows at Edgeworth. “You’re… still planning on paying me when I’m gone?”

“Oh course,” Edgeworth sat back in his chair, dumbfounded. “Your vacation time is yours to spend. I’m sure you have other assets from your rock band—,”

Klavier snorted. As his manager always reminded him, he’d have money from the Gavinners for years to come.

“—but there is no reason for you to have to take time off and not touch your vacation days.”

“I do appreciate it,” Klavier finished his tea. He moved as if to set the pair of China back on the desk, decided against it, then sat back in his chair once more, left with nothing but to tap on the handle with his forefinger. “But I cannot assure you that I will want to return once everything is figured out.” If everything will ever be figured out, he added in his head.

He waited for a moment, though for what, he was unsure. Perhaps Herr Edgeworth would rescind his offer, or kick him out of the office. Perhaps he would simply be fired, and given some sort of severance deal. He had phrased it as a leave of absence when he walked in; he could only hope that Herr Edgeworth remembered the fact.

The sound of leather shifting and China clinking together brought Klavier back to the real world in time to see a slow wave of magenta rise from the desk. Edgeworth moved slowly, each step measured, until he reached Klavier’s side. Gingerly, he leaned back against the desk, squatting low enough to perch on top of the surface. His arms crossed themselves over his chest. He’d yet to make eye contact with Klavier, but the expression on his face remained unreadable, as if he were measuring his words carefully. His lips, pursed into a tight line, seemed to drag his eyebrows into a troubled scowl. Klavier braced himself for the worst, noticing all this in his peripheral vision. He kept his eyes locked on the cup in his hand.

“Klavier,” he started quietly, and the man in question raised his head. He’d never heard Edgeworth address him so casually. Usually, when he spoke the German first name, it was as an introduction, but always in the clean German accent. This felt…different, though. When he continued, it was in Klavier’s native language. “I… I am not firing you. I want you to treat this leave of absence as a time for you to get your head on straight. Please, take as much time as you need; you will always have a place here, should you wish to return.” Surprised, Klavier turned his head up to see the same empathetic stare plastered onto the older man’s face. He looked so much older than Klavier knew him to be; in that moment, he carried the weight of not only his own past, but also Klavier’s. “I know what it’s like to feel alone, but we are your family. Should you need, or want, our help, you can
always find a home here.”

Klavier felt his face flush red once again, and he ducked his head before the hot tears stinging his eyes could betray him. *Get it together,* he thought to himself. *This isn’t the place for this.* The hard knot in the back of his throat tasted bitter on its way down, but he forced it there all the same.

“Thank you,” he murmured, feeling much like a child that had just snapped at their father. “Herr Edgeworth, I—,” words failed him, and he slumped in his chair again, suddenly feeling the weight of the past three years all over again. He took a deep breath in to stifle the break in his voice. “Thank you.”

“I will, however, need to ask that you clear out your office,” Edgeworth turned back to English, and Klavier set the cup down. Whatever had just happened between them, he would have to focus more on later. Right now, he was grateful to go back to business. “Since this is an indefinite sabbatical, I cannot guarantee that your office will not be needed for new prosecutors.”

“Right,” he nodded, slipping back into the familiar feeling of inadequacy. “It might take me a few days—“

“As long as it doesn’t take a week, we will have no issues,” Edgeworth nodded, and Klavier stood up.

“Well, you know me,” he turned with a devilish grin to his elder. “I have a lot of stuff, so I might as well start tonight.”

“Whatever suits you,” Edgeworth pushed himself into a standing position as he spoke, hands spread. Once they were on the same level again, he took a moment to take in the young face.

He remembered standing in Gavin’s position, lost, confused, and depressed. He could still feel the shame of his actions in the back of his throat. A part of him beamed with pride; he’d striven for the top for so long in order to have this opportunity. The law was a messy, unruly place. With so much grey in a world where black and white reigned, he knew firsthand how deep the wounds could run, and how much they could bleed. A well of gratitude formed itself in his stomach, and he couldn’t help but smile at the man in front of him.

Somewhere, deep inside, he knew Klavier would be okay. At least he hadn’t left a foolish note for which he would spend the rest of his life apologizing.

He reached into his coat’s inner breast pocket and produced a business card. Turning it over, he scribbled his cell phone number on the back and handed it over to the man.

“In case of emergency,” he offered. “You have a long road ahead.”

Klavier took the offered card, and stared at the digits on the backside. He couldn’t help the smile that came to his face; finally, a genuine smile. He pocketed the card, and held out his hand. “Chief Prosecutor,” he offered.

“Prosecutor Gavin,” Edgeworth nodded, taking the offered hand in a firm shake. “It’s been a pleasure. I look forward to seeing where Klavier Gavin goes from here.”

“Who knows?” He grinned, holding the handshake for a moment longer, reveling in the feeling of human contact. He’d isolated himself for so long that he’d almost forgotten how a simple handshake felt. “Maybe the rockstar life is calling my name again.”

“I’ll make sure to pick up every album,” Edgeworth promised, breaking the contact. Klavier almost
choked at the isolation once more. Before he could make a fool of himself, he turned to the door. He’d almost made it when Edgeworth called his name again. He stopped in the doorway, one hand on the inside of the frame, “I don’t give out my personal number often; I’m serious about my offer.”

“I—” Klavier started, but the bank in which he held all his witty responses finally charged him a backdraft; he could only try for a few moments to think of anything, and then offer a strained smile. “Thank you.”

Edgeworth’s business card weighed Klavier’s back pocket down the entire walk back to his own office. He’d been lucky to catch the stylist before she finished her job; he’d played around with the idea of cutting his hair over and over again, but he’d never gone through with it…

He’d have to work on his impulse control. He added it to the long list in his brain.

By the time he’d snapped out of his episode, he hardly remembered telling her to shave his head. Logically, he knew there was an echo of him consenting to the buzz, but his crash-landing back into the real world had caused her hand to slip, and she’d cut off a good chunk of his hair, straight down to the scalp.

After that, well, he was lucky to still have what little remained. Once the woman had recovered from the initial shock and resulting peevishness of her client changing his mind on her, she’d actually done well in saving the remaining tufts. She’d shaved him an undercut, isolating the hair on the crown of his head and buzzing the rest into a soft, close-cropped fuzz. What remained she shut short; his bangs fell just below his eyes, and the ruffle continued to the back of his head.

All in all, he was happy with it. Even if it had been a snap decision in the middle of a depressive episode, he felt…lighter. It was probably just the physical feeling of his thick hair gone, but breaking his routine felt like a step in the right direction, and he was happy for it. Had he gone to his regular salon, not the random corporate chain, his regular stylist would never have let him do such a thing. But in that moment, he’d been a stranger to the woman.

A feeling he’d not yet come to terms with, but savored nonetheless.

He stared at his office. Edgeworth had given him a week to clear it out, and he would probably take that much time, just to be sure he didn’t run into any nosy co-workers. He hadn’t shown his face to the prosecutor’s office earlier than noon in almost a year; he would have to continue that, no matter how quickly he wanted his equipment back.

_Maybe I can swindle an old roadie to come and help me_, he thought to himself, staring at the wall of guitars in front of him. He dug out the headphones that he’d removed to speak to Edgeworth, and placed one in his ear. Pulling out his phone, he pressed ‘play’ on his keypad, and let the metal course through his head again. Desperate to keep the air of quiet, he turned the volume one notch away from muted, and stared at the task at hand.

He’d have to call a cab home anyway. In his desperate need to leave the house, he’d forgotten his motorcycle keys in his penthouse, and returning would have only encouraged him to stay inside for the rest of the day.

Thankfully, he was without the motorcycle, so he was able to pack up half of his guitars.
The office supplies would have to wait until he could make a trip with a box. It wasn’t as if he wanted to make multiple trips, but what few personal affects he had, he would have to return at a later date.

As he opened the tall glass case, he let his eyes brush over all the guitars hanging inside. *I...might be a pack rat,* he thought to himself, selecting the acoustic guitar he’d used for the Gavinners’ first world tour. He’d used it once before being gifted with a new one, but the emotional ties to it still tugged at his chest even in the present. Carefully, he guided it into the case and snapped it shut, running an absent hand over the plastic. He continued on that way with a few more, carefully slipping each into a case and stacking it by the door. Thankfully, he’d kept all the cases at the prosecutor’s office in case he’d had to grab one and run. As the case cleared out and the pile of guitars grew larger and larger, he slowed, staring at the last guitar.

It was a 2018 Charvel Pro-Mod DK24, brand new despite its age. He’d found it on tour around America with the Gavinners, the black finish contrasted against pale maple neck staring him down from the case in which it stood. Despite Daryan’s objections, he’d asked for a test play.

“You already have too many guitars on this tour, Gavin, what do you need this one for?” He’d asked, and Klavier had stared at the instrument much like he did now, holding it at arm’s length with one hand cradling the base of the neck and the other the body, and admiring the double-locking bridge. He didn’t have to pluck the strings to know it was out of tune, but he could hear that test run loud as if his sixteen-year-old self were playing in the seat behind him.

“I’m not sure,” he’d responded as if in a dream. “But would you listen to that?” He’d pulled into a few warm-up exercises, making sure to hold on to a few passing notes just to hear the black beauty sing for him.

“It’s too goth for your image,” their manager had dismissed it without even looking up, and Klavier had frowned.

“Fine, then I’ll buy it myself,” he’d said with the teenage defiance he’d almost coined on that tour. “And it’ll sound great with the songs we have.”

“No way,” Daryan had scoffed. “I’m not carrying it. It’s just going to collect dust in your case, who cares?”

Klavier frowned at the decade-old memory. His friend had been right about one thing; despite Klavier’s love for it, it had sat in his case for over ten years. He’d brought it out for experiments at home, but every time he’d tried incorporating it into a Gavinners song, it had always felt so...wrong.

*I’m alone now,* he thought. *No image to hold up anymore. Maybe...* Despite the strings he hadn’t tuned in years, he ran his thumb over the little E string, and it whined. *Play me,* it almost begged.

“Oh, fine,” he murmured to himself, making a promise to plug it in once he returned home.

He’d lowered it from his grasp, crouching to lay it in its case, when the sound of footsteps surprised him out of his silence. He whirled around, suddenly cursing his position. His knees ached in the twist, and he had to grab on to the corner of his desk in order to keep himself upright, ripping out the earbud in the process. The footsteps grew closer, and Klavier felt his stomach drop. He’d prepared all day to face Herr Edgeworth; having to face another prosecutor without such preparation felt cruel. Eyes wide, he waited with bated breath as another sound filled the air, preceding the sound of
combat boots on hardwood floor.

A sound Klavier had heard from himself many times in the past.

The sound wasn’t muffled, no, just…quiet. Klavier strained his ears to hear the sound of a quiet, breathy bass…voice?

Someone is singing, he had to tell himself in order to really believe it himself. Who let in another human?

The voice, as well as the steps, grew closer and closer, until Klavier felt his patience run thin. He couldn’t place the song, but Klavier didn’t care in that moment. The voice sounded…untrained, raw. In a silent hall, Klavier felt as arrested as the criminals described in records scattered across the floor. Butterflies echoed in his stomach as he listened, the confidence only found in an amateur’s sense of security growing.

An amateur, yes, but as the voice grew closer, Klavier had to bite his lips together to keep from calling out to see who it was.

If he did, he was positive the voice would stop, and that would have been the most heinous crime Klavier Gavin would ever commit.

In that moment, when he almost called out to the stranger, the voice grew closest to his door, and abruptly turned in the opposite direction.

Klavier wasn’t sure what he’d expected. A janitor, perhaps? To the best of his knowledge, he and Herr Edgeworth were the only prosecutors that kept strange enough hours to stay so late.

He hadn’t expected to see a long black vest settling back in its place, nor a thick ponytail bobbing up and down with each step the man took. His knee-high boots echoed in the hall under his tone, an even-yet-offbeat drum for his song.

Had he any cares in the world, Klavier would have picked up his jaw from the floor and pushed it back into place, but as it were, he could only stare at the man shuffling papers as he continued down the hall to—what Klavier assumed—his own office. The further away he moved, the quieter his voice became, and the more desperate to hear it the blond felt.

Ignoring the creak in his knees as he stood, Klavier followed him, kicking off his sandals in order to pad quietly behind Simon Blackquill. He silently prayed that the samurai would continue on his way. If he were to turn around to see an all-but-absent prosecutor half crouched in a slink behind him, Klavier was certain he would melt into the floor out of sheer embarrassment. Pages flipped in Simon’s hands, and Klavier frowned at the noise they produced. At the next corner, he pressed himself against the wall and let Simon gain a few extra feet before sidling around. The sound of different, fuller music came from the next hall, and Klavier’s eyes locked on the third-to-last door on his left. A soft light, most likely from a floor lamp, emanated from the doorway to which Simon walked. He paused for a moment, realigning his voice with the song, and started again, this time a little louder, and much more confident now that he wasn’t a cappella. Simon crossed the hall and entered the office without looking up, adding volume with each step he took into the cadence. As if he were in a trance, Klavier followed the sound of chugging guitars and pounding bass lines to the same side, waiting as the prosecutor’s voice cut out of the last high note the singer on the recording hit. It was a different tone entirely, but in the absence of Simon’s voice, Klavier felt…disappointed. He’d figured that it was only his nostalgia from the guitar collection that drew him along to Simon Blackquill’s office, but even the sound of the famous singer sounded too canned for Klavier.
Absently, he knew he’d heard the song previously in his desperate search for rock music that didn’t come in a pop-rock package.

He continued closer until he was right outside the doorway, the wailing guitar solo coming to an end. The bridge, to Klavier’s glee, sounded much softer than the rest of the song, and Simon, unaware of Klavier’s presence, began to sing again, smoothly transitioning through the baritone and tenor notes as if he’d been singing the same song his entire life.

Something in Klavier’s chest tightened, and he pressed his back against the wall against which he was pressed. Leaning his head back against the painted sheetrock, he let his eyes slide shut. A single eyebrow furrowed at the last high note, which Simon held four beats longer than the recording, and Klavier’s entire being melted.

Simon Blackquill could sing. And no one had told him.

The music changed, and Klavier stood stock still, waiting for Simon to start singing again. When the recording continued, but the man inside did not, he pursed his lips and pushed away from the wall, starting on his way back to his own office with renewed vigor.

For the past three years, he’d walked in a haze. Sure, he’d tried to force some semblance of purpose into his gait to try and reassure himself that he was fine, but it had always disappeared within a moment or two.

Now, as he walked to the beat of the chugging Pro-Mod waiting for him in his office, he didn’t have to fake the purpose. In fact, it carried him all the way to his desk, through his contacts, and to the number he’d stared at for years, but never dialed. Now, almost without thinking, he selected the contact and held the phone to his ear while he kicked the door shut. Once his foot was back on the ground, he used the other to toe open the case once more, and stared down at the guitar he’d been so adamant to buy, but too nervous to use. It had been months since he’d last held a guitar, and even longer than that since he’d recorded anything, but the lyricist in him had never stopped working. He turned away from the guitar only to reach into his desk and pull out the leather bound book inside and toss it on the keyboard in front of his screen.

Sure, he’d ‘retired’ from music after the Gavinners, but he’d had just about enough of the pop punk scene long before he found out that Daryan was a criminal. Something hidden deep inside of him, perhaps the incessant need to prove he was worthy of the stage, of his awards, and his guitars, had always driven his fascination with metal. Were it not for his guitar solos, in fact, the Gavinners would have sounded like a Generation Z Beatles. His hands itched as he thought of piecing together a new riff, or a new solo.

“Hello?” The voice on the other side sounded surprised, if not a little miffed.

“Dee,” Klavier cut her off, and she let out an incredulous laugh.

“Klavier Gavin,” she laughed. “I thought the next time I’d see you, it’d be your picture in the obituaries.”

He winced, only wishing that she knew how close to home her words hit. “Not quite,” he grinned anyway. “How are you? What are you doing? How are the kids?”

“Cut the crap, Gavin,” she deadpanned. “I don’t hear from you in years, and I finally get a call from you in the middle of date night? This better be good.”

“You didn’t have to do that—,”
“Gavin, you better be calling me to fire me or to tell me you want back in the game.”

Finally realizing what he was about to say, Klavier paused, suddenly wary of his words. The cobwebs of anxiety started clouding his head again, and his hand almost dropped away from his ear. Perhaps he should’ve thought this through before calling his manager. He took another look down at the Pro-Mod. It stared back at him, and Simon’s voice echoed in his head.

_Don’t do this, Klavier_, Kristoph’s voice echoed in his head, and, ever the defiant child, his lip curled in disgust. He shot a look at his reflection staring back at him from the guitar case. Instead of a disheveled Kristoph staring back at him, for the first time in ten years, Klavier stared back at… himself.

“Ja, I want back in,” the words were rushed, and he was met with a hissed ‘yes’ from the other end.


“Nein,” Klavier cut her off. “The Gavinners are dead.”

Dee was quiet for a moment. “You’re kidding me, right?”

“I am not,” he assured her, turning back to his desk. Absently, he set a hand on the stack of papers that had been pushed to the side. “And I’m going to need some band mates. Good ones.”

“A-all right,” she sputtered. “What are you thinking?”

“The usual. Rhythm guitar, bass, keys, drums.”

“Taking lead guitar and singing again?”

“Nein,” he grinned to himself.

“What do you mean, ‘nein’? You’re Klavier Gavin, and you aren’t singing?”

Klavier spread out the papers, hoping to find something useful.

“I’ve found a singer.”

“Wait, wait, wait,” Klavier could see her waving her hands in front of her face. “What’s he from? Do I know him from anywhere?”

“Nein.”

“Would you stop that?” She snapped.

“He’s not a musician—,”

“Klavier Gavin—,”

“Yet,” klavier added, a piece of notebook paper staring at him between two search warrants. Raising an eyebrow, he pulled it from its place, and a graphite mess stared back at him. “He’s not a musician yet. But he’s good, Dee. Every metal band’s dream.”

“Metal? You want to get back in the game as a metal band?”

“Doch!” He felt something rise in his stomach as he made out what he’d scribbled on the page. “Pop
punk isn’t going anywhere, Dee.” Silence protruded the phone, and he only wished he could see the woman’s face. He held a special fondness for Dee; she’d joined the Gavinners late in the game, but damn, she was good. He set the abstract phoenix down on top of the rest of the papers. A little fine tuning from a real artist, and... “Just... get your feelers out. I have a good feeling about this.”

“Fine, fine, fine,” she let out a long sigh. “Just answer one more question.”

“Ja, anything.” He smiled down at his next tattoo.

“Has this mystery man agreed to join the band?”

“Dee, Dee, Dee,” he grinned. “You don’t think I’ve asked him already?”

Silence.

“I know for a fact you haven’t asked him yet.”

Damn, she was good.

“Leave it to me. Just get your feelers out there.”

Chapter End Notes

tumblr
playlist
aesthetic
Chapter Summary

Time has come, I have to leave you
Don't know how, 'cause it feels so right
It is you I have to break through?
But I know you'll win the fight.

Chapter Notes

I'm realizing, now, that all the songfics I did when I was in high school must have all been leading to this. S/O to the angsty teenager who wore the same MCR sweatshirt every day for four years.
Thanks to everyone who's left love on this, starting new projects is daunting, and every bit of feedback helps!

Tumblr
Playlist
Aesthetic

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Klavier’s cab ride home consisted of little else than bouncing his leg up and down, checking his phone, and staring out the window. Simon’s tune lingered in the back of his mind, and he drummed out the piano strokes on his knee as if he had a piano in front of him. At the present moment, he didn’t care if it was similar to the song he’d been listening to; his eyes turned to the guitar he’d kept next to him instead of in the trunk of the cab. For a few extra dollars added to his bill, the cabbie was generous enough to help him bring his haul up to his penthouse, and leave the guitars in his entryway. With a promise to clean up the mess later, Klavier had cleared a path to the one room he hadn’t opened in almost a year. He’d cleared away box after box until he could reach the door, his hands itching to make the Pro-Mod sing the entire way. With the doorway to his in-home studio finally cleared, he’d grabbed the case and sat in the middle of a forgotten dust bunny, songwriting notebook laid open in front of his crossed legs. He’d had to blow off the thick layer of dust from the cable before plugging in the guitar, and the amplifier had taken a moment to buzz awake after so long in a comatose state, but once he was set, he lost himself in the almost-forgotten haze of songwriting.

Before his life had turned into black and white, he’d scribbled poems in the hopes that it would cure some of his angst. They were mostly bits and pieces of rage he’d picked up every once in a while. Staring down at them, rewording a few bits here and there as he worked, he didn’t realize how dark—or real—some of the lyrics were. He remembered it helping in the interim, but now, as he stared at the words, he felt a mixture of pride and embarrassment. He circled and highlighted a few lines here and there, stringing them together in his head between a few broken chords.

When you hit rock bottom, you really don’t hold back, he jeered at himself, hitting ‘record’ on his
phone again and trying another crack at the new riff.

As he’d suspected, the Pro-Mod sang exactly how he’d always dreamed. The riffs strung together like they’d been waiting to do so for years, and when he hit a full chorus, the wall of sound coming from the amp in front of him rocked him to his core.

Feeling more alive in the present than he had in years, Klavier Gavin spent the entire night in front of the amplifier, determined to lay down at least one scratch track before he could rest.

Luckily, he’d reached that goal and three others before the sun poked its way over the horizon, and spilled in through the open door. Were he feeling more like his normal (well, normal in recent years) self, he would have crawled straight back into bed and stayed there for a few days.

As it were, however, he sat back and hit ‘stop’ on his phone with a contented sigh. The tablature (which he’d been lucky to find in the dusty desk shoved into the corner of the room) stared back at him, graphite smudges and ink smears tainting the page from a clean white to dirty gray. Sitting back, he passed a hand over his face, continuing the smudge onto his cheek. He kept his hand there a moment, savoring the feeling of his own skin.

This is what he’d been missing. Poetry had always come off as too dull, too depressing for him, but this…

Burying his true emotions under layers of distortion and squealing solos had always been his talent, after all. He stared at his phone again, watching as the recording exported itself into his music library.

Dee would pull together strings for the band. He just needed a singer to complete the picture. Simon Blackquill came to the front of his mind again, and Klavier felt his lips turn up. Now, all he had to do was get the man to agree. As if it would be hard.

He caught himself before he got too far ahead; if he got his hopes up again, he’d be more likely to be let down. With a deep frown, he reached forward and flipped the amplifier off. The little red light slowly faded out, and he unplugged the cord in the back of the guitar.

I told Dee that he was the one, but I’m still not sure myself, he thought as he began to pack up, curling the cord up and hanging it on its designated nail. He paused, right hand still resting on the bundled cords. The last thing I need is another Daryan on my hands. He shook his head, flipping the lights off with a promise to properly clean up later.

Stepping out of the studio, he raised both arms above his head and stretched, listening to his back release a few pops in the process. He continued to his couch, collapsing onto the cushions with a deep exhale. Despite his sudden burst of energy, he couldn’t deny the fact that his eyes had dried out hours ago. His contacts all but sighed at the relief. Perhaps pulling two all-nighters five years ago had been a good idea, but now, he felt tired down to the bone.

Maybe…a nap before I try and track down Blackquill, he thought, turning onto his side and curling himself into a fetal position.

For a moment, his home was silent.

A few even breaths calmed his racing mind, and, in that moment, he could have fallen asleep. His subconscious began to take over. The familiar feeling of the pads of his fingers pulsing with every heartbeat lulled him into a comfortable quiet.
This is nice, he thought to himself, a small smile placating his lips. I haven’t felt this content since…

A searing, sharp pain burst through his head, as if he’d been clocked with a bat, and he flinched away from the back of the couch, hands flying to either side of his head.

“My, my, Klavier. You disappoint me.”

An overwhelming sense of dread flooded him, and he squeezed his eyes shut.

“You find the trees, yet miss the forest!”

Get out, get out, get out, he thought to himself over and over again, but his limbs no longer heeded his direction. In a feeble attempt to break himself out, he dug his fingers into his scalp.

“Give up this dream, Klavier,” a young Kristoph chided him, and suddenly, Klavier was back in his traveling clothes, about to head out to the tour bus. He’d asked Kristoph if he’d be available to talk once they reached the hotel, and Kristoph had reached forward, grabbing him by his forearm mid-wave. “You can’t just run away from your life’s work when you feel a little sad.” The same searing disappointment from Kristoph ripped through his chest, and for a moment, he could still feel his brother’s pristine fingernails pressing into his skin.

Klavier jolted back into the present with a loud gasp, heart thumping in his throat and eyes screaming against the growing sunlight. He stared into the space between the coffee table and TV stand for a moment. His eyes locked on the carpet for a solid twenty seconds, struggling to see strands of fabric instead of the strands of Kristoph’s hair that had frizzled out in that afternoon’s heat. Slowly, the feeling of his couch came back to him, and his muscles finally relaxed. Almost limp on the couch, he let his head fall back against the arm rest.

I shouldn’t have called Dee, he thought to himself. I shouldn’t have gone to Herr Edgeworth. I…I can’t just run off…

The same, comfortable numbness that he’d lived in his adolescence crept back, and feeling much like he’d just received a verbal lashing, and he pulled out his phone again. He unlocked it with a touch and found Dee’s contact. As if he were in a trance, he typed a message out, thumbs hardly hitting the keys in their rush to get it out:

Dee,

I thank you for your help, but please disregard our conversation from last night. I wasn’t well, and I was out of line. I am sorry, but I will not be losing control again.

His right thumb paused over the ‘send’ arrow, and he read the message over and over to himself. Kristoph’s words echoed in his mind, a chorus over and over again.

“You’re spinning out of control.”

Stop that, he thought to himself, pursing his lips together and glaring at his hand. This…this wasn’t a rational decision. I don’t want to keep running away from my commitments. I’m making the decision to back out myself, all right? It’s my decision, not his—

He didn’t even believe it himself. His teeth sunk into his lower lip.

“Prosecutor Gavin!” A new voice echoed in his mind, and in his surprise, the phone slipped from his fingers, and onto his chest. “Remember what’s important to you!”
Herr Forehead, he felt a wave of relief flood over him, and slammed his eyes shut, focusing all of his energy on the man from his memory. There, Apollo stood from across the courtroom, finger extended, and pointing right at Klavier. Three years ago, his words had pushed him on when he’d almost backed out of the trial.

Now, the defense attorney pushed him back to last night, standing outside of Blackquill’s office, staring at an empty wall, yet completely and utterly captivated by the voice inside.

Turning his head back to the carpet, a new wave of relief washed over Klavier when he only saw carpet fibers, not the frizz Kristoph tried so very hard to keep under control in the hot California summer. Renewed with vigor, and fully back in the present, he snatched his phone off his chest, sat up, and dug his pointer finger into the ‘delete’ button. He shook his head as he watched the text disappear.

“Stupid, stupid, stupid,” he muttered to himself. He sat up straight, resting his elbows on his knees and tossing the phone onto the coffee table. He scrubbed his face with his hands, resting his chin in his hands and staring into the void of his living room. At least I caught it early, he thought to himself with a heavy sigh. Any longer and I’d have an angry Dee on my hands. Fatigue still tugged at his body, but the thought of sleep twisted his stomach. At least when he was awake he had a chance of keeping Kristoph locked in the back of his mind, not the other way around.

Well, Herr Forehead, he thought, snatching up his phone again and opening his Twitter feed. He ignored the notifications that begged to be read, instead opting to select the search bar at the top of the screen. This is important to me, now.

Halfway into entering ‘Simon Blackquill’, a picture of the man’s bird in a stocking hat popped up next to the username ‘@bitch-dono’. One of Klavier’s eyebrows rose on his forehead, and with a small smile, he selected the account. He hardly read the account summary, which offered a sullen ‘whet soba gives me a discount if i @ them’, instead, his eyes locking in on the first tweet.

@bitch-dono : coffee machine broke. not saying it was taka but the perp left peck marks. guess whip it is a decent backup.

The smile on Klavier’s face turned into a all-out grin, and he locked the phone, pushing himself to his feet and tossing it onto his coffee table again.

“Achtung,” he muttered to no one in particular, hoping it would bolster his shaken confidence. “Time to find myself a new bandmate.”

Deciding that his motorcycle would be too obvious, Klavier dug out his car keys from their dejected place in his drawer and walked down to the parking garage. The coupe, a blue-grey color, hadn’t been driven in weeks. He’d been sticking solely to his motorcycle lately, and, truth be told, had to remind himself that he didn’t need to twist on the steering wheel for it to lurch into motion. He’d rolled down the windows in an attempt to make the wind breeze through his hair, and fought the urge to simply stick his head out of the window the entire drive to the coffee store.

Whip It, the coffee store Blackquill had mentioned in his tweet, was surprisingly busy for a Thursday morning. Upon first glance, Klavier didn’t see the samurai, but with another glance down the booths, he noticed a familiar hawk peering above the heads of the other patrons. Sure enough, Taka
had perched himself on Simon’s shoulder, and a quick look at the table confirmed that he was staring down at a book, hands flipping the pages every so often. Klavier stared for a moment, trying to come up with something—anything—to say.

_I should have thought something through_, he berated himself, feeling his mind go blank again. _How do I even approach him? ‘Hi, Herr Blackquill, we hardly work together, but I heard you singing the other day and I think you're really talented, do you want to leave your budding career as a prosecutor and come join a band?’_

Klavier stood still for so long that a makeshift line started to form behind him, and it wasn’t until the person directly behind him tapped him on the shoulder that he realized how long he’d been still.

“Sir?” She peered around him, and Klavier turned to see seven people staring at him. The sudden, agonizing knowledge that a large gap stretched between him and the order counter turned his cheeks red.

“E-entschuldigung,” he gave a sheepish wave, trying to ignore the hawk staring at him from across the room, and stepping forward to the counter. As the barista behind the counter greeted him—again—he turned back over his shoulder to make sure Simon was still seated where he’d left him, only to see Taka still watching him carefully.

_Please, don’t rat me out_, he thought, stepping aside once his order had been placed. _I’m just going to…follow you for a little bit._

Simon stayed at Whip It for three and a half hours, lost in his book. Klavier had left the house with only his phone and laptop, one of which he’d forgotten to charge. Once his laptop had fizzled out of power, he’d resorted to his phone, playing Bejeweled between glances over his sunglasses at the prosecutor. After a few glares from Taka, the bird seemed to finally cal down, hopping off of Simon’s shoulder and onto the table, where he remained until Simon shut his book and stood. Klavier, who had been ready to move for almost an hour, waited until the man had passed him before he slid out of his own booth, ducking around a few more patrons to push open the door right as Blackquill reached his own car. Trying his best to look calm, Klavier did the same, waiting until the other car had pulled out of the lot before he screeched out behind him, tossing the car into gear and tearing down the highway after Simon’s sedan.

Klavier wasn’t sure exactly why he hadn’t simply…_asked_ Simon in the coffee shop. His phone had been buzzing every half hour, at least, with Dee’s persistent please for him to get confirmation. Every time, Klavier had pushed her off, sending her an emoji or the letter ‘K’. He’d agree it was childish, but he also found himself pausing every time he started mustering up the courage to speak up.

He followed Simon all the way to the veterinarian’s office, pulling into a space on the opposite side of the lot and jamming the car into ‘park’. He had no good reason to follow Simon into the doctor’s office like he had with the coffee shop, so he sunk down in his seat, pulled the cap low over his eyes, and thought.

Sure, he’d never actually _seen_ Simon Blackquill in court, but the the rumors were daunting enough even to give him pause. Stories of mind games, the power of suggestion, all of it…even his icy demeanor kept Klavier on edge. After Daryan and Kristoph, he wasn’t sure he’d be willing to play
any more mind games. He’d heard him down the hall every so often, poking fun at a passerby or debating an episode of the Steel Samurai like a guilty verdict depended on it. From what he’d heard, even when he wasn’t grilling witnesses on the stand, Simon enjoyed his games. And maybe, in the short run, that would be fine, but Klavier had to know if the twisted samurai would know when to stop. If he could figure that part out, then he’d ask him right then and there.

Right as the thought passed his head, the bird perched on Simon’s shoulder looked over its shoulder, staring Klavier in the eyes. He pushed himself lower in his seat, suddenly grateful for Dee, who was calling. Again.

“Dee,” he answered, holding the phone up to his ear in the hopes that he would trick the bird into thinking he wasn’t following them.

“Finally!” The woman exclaimed, exasperated. “Have you been ignoring me?”

“Me? No, never,” he peeked over his steering wheel just in time to see Simon and Taka disappear into the veterinarian’s office. “Why would I do that?”

“Please tell me you’ve talked with him.”

“I…” Klavier trailed off, and Dee groaned on the other side of the phone.

“You’re impossible,” she decided. “Why not?”

“Well—,” he started, but when the door opened and the bird-less Simon stepped out into the open, he almost dropped the phone. Hastily holding it to his face, he excused himself. “Dee, I’ll have to call you back, I’m going into a tunnel—,"

“Klavier!” She tried in vain as he hung up, waiting for Simon’s car to pull out of the lot and back onto the road before he took off in pursuit.

Simon’s next stop was…well, Klavier stared up at the building in disdain. He knew he’d have to return to the building some day or another, but now, staring up at it, he wished he would have had a few days in between his awkward ‘not adoption’ into the Edgeworth family.

Logically, he knew that his card would grant him access until his vacation days were over, but he’d hoped that his returns to the Prosecutor’s Office would happen at night, when his chances of running into anyone were slim to none. Now, watching the people file in and out like ants to a hill, he felt his stomach drop. There was little he would have done to just…sink into his seat and become one with the leather.

But, he thought to himself, our offices are…decently soundproof. Maybe I can ask him a few questions there…

He pulled the door open and stood, finally feeling the effects of his two all-nighters. The world around him spun for a moment, and he knew that he should sit, were he less focused on the task at hand. As a compromise, he leaned against the side of his car, watching Blackquill pull the parking garage’s door open and step inside. His phone, tucked into the back pocket of his jeans, buzzed again. He pulled it out, seeing Dee’s contact name again.
“I love you, Dee,” he muttered, “but you’ve got to let me work.”

With a huff, he turned and tossed the phone back into his car, slamming the door shut and stalking away from the vehicle. He pulled the door open and the cap lower over his eyes, suddenly glad his hair was gone. It had always given him away on days such as this, where he didn’t want to be seen, and now, he finally felt invisible.

Simon led the way to his office, and Klavier kept a safe distance from him, plucking a random file from an intern and filing through it, despite her objections. He made it halfway down the hallway, eyeing Simon the entire way, before she caught up to him and grabbed him by the sleeve.

“Excuse me,” she demanded, crossing her arms over her chest. “But civilians aren’t allowed to look at classified files.”

Caught, Klavier turned from Blackquill, who was disappearing from sight, to the woman, and back again. “I—” he tried. He could leave the woman with her files, but were he in her place, he would raise some sort of alarm that a creepy man in a baseball cap was stealing files for no reason.

Blackquill would have to wait. He had to take care of this, first.

“Excuse me, Fraulein,” he turned back to her, winking. “I think I mistook you for a colleague of mine.”

She took a moment, finally connecting the dots in her head. “Prosecutor Gavin, I’m sorry,” she shrank back.

“Nonsense,” he snapped the file shut and handed it to her, bowing slightly. “I apologize for my rudeness. Please, go about your day.” She placed her hands on the file and Klavier pulled it closer to himself, and in return, her. “And…please do not tell anyone you saw me, ja?”

“Uh, sure,” she nodded, trying to hide the smile and blush that flushed her face. “Absolutely.”

“Danke,” he released the files, tipping his cap to her and continuing down the hallway. The lighthearted conversation followed him for a few steps before his mask slipped way, and he let out a silent breath. His odd hours had made him almost a ghost of the prosecutor’s office, and, oddly enough, it felt good to know that he could still be Klavier Gavin, rockstar.

It was much better than being Klavier Gavin, failure.

“Prosecutor Gavin,” Edgeworth’s voice brought him back to the present, and he wheeled around to see the man in question staring at him with quirked brow. “I didn’t expect to see you back here so soon.”

Klavier felt all the blood drain form his face for a moment, only to return in a flush. He’s the last person I want to see!

“Ja, well, I—,” Klavier’s eyes darted around, trying to find an escape. Luckily, Simon Blackquill rounded the corner at that moment, eyes locked onto his phone and thumb darting around the keys. “I, uh,” he continued, watching the man as he moved to the copy room. “I’m here to pick up a few things,” he decided, turning his attention back to Edgeworth, who had leaned around Klavier to try and see where he was staring. “Just some last few things. You know, leave and everything.”

“Yes, I understood,” Edgeworth nodded, both brows furrowing as he took in Klavier more carefully. “Gavin, have you slept—?”
“O-of course!” Klavier reached up to fiddle with his hair, remembered it was gone, and opted instead to rub the back of his neck. Simon entered into the hallway again, his sole piece of paper multiplied into an entire pile. Klavier forced himself to look back at Edgeworth, whose gray eyes turned from Blackquill back to the man in front of him. “Anything I do not take can be cleared out. I brought all the important stuff home yesterday.”

“Very well,” Edgeworth nodded. “Many happy returns, then. And good luck with…whatever you have planned for Prosecutor Blackquill.”

Before Klavier could stumble over his words more, Edgeworth turned to walk away, taking a delicate sip of his tea as he went.

_Remind me never to piss him off_, Klavier shuddered at the thought, turning down the hallway to Blackquill’s office—

Only to come face-to-face with the man himself, hands empty of any papers, and shoved deep into his coat pockets.

“Herr Blackquill!” Klavier sputtered, realizing how short he felt next to the looming figure.

“Gavin-dono,” Simon nodded. “Pardon me,” he nodded, repositioning himself to walk around him and continue on his way.

Wait, Klavier’s tongue seemed to cleave itself to the roof of his mouth. He cursed, turning and watching as he continued down the hallway, his long legs carrying him with ease through the passing people.

_I’m not even short_, he thought to himself with a frown before he turned on his heel in pursuit of the samurai. _How does he do that?_

The next time Simon stepped into his car, he moved from the Prosecutor’s Office, back to the veterinarian’s office to pick up a freshly-groomed Taka, and then to a fast-food restaurant for, what Klavier assumed, lunch. He’d decided to pass; he’d missed lunch and dinner the day before, and, were he being honest, his stomach was already used to the emptiness. He made a small promise to eat before he slept—whenever that happened. He hadn’t felt the fatigue nearly as bad during the day as he did on the way out of the restaurant’s parking lot, and he slapped himself in the face to wake up. Sleeping and eating felt like they were only guidelines at this point. He slept when needed and ate when the felt hungry. Whether or not those times coincided with what was deemed ‘normal’, ‘healthy’, or ‘responsible’, well…he couldn’t find the will to care anymore.

He’d turned on the car only to have it recite that he’d missed a few texts and voicemails, but blessedly, it did not ring again. He glanced down at an intersection, his phone displaying the latest message from Dee. Short and sweet, it cut straight to the point.

“I will, he thought, wishing he could communicate telepathically with the woman. Sure, he could write out all his emotions and reasons why he hadn’t asked Herr Blackquill into his band, but that could take hours, possibly days, and for what? For Dee to know that he was terrified of repeating his life so far, that he was afraid people turned into monsters around him, or that he was doomed to make
new friends only to watch them disappear from his life? No. Klavier Gavin pursed his lips together. He’d make friends again, he’d just…have to build up some emotional endurance, first. A little loneliness between friends was worth keeping his heart safe. *I just…need to be certain.*

Simon’s blinker flashed to life, and Klavier sunk down in his seat, hitting the brakes and memorizing the street name onto which he turned before he passed it. He’d been following Simon for a long stretch of side road, and didn’t want to seem too obvious in his pursuit. He pulled off to the ditch, letting a few cars pass before he whipped around, Turing on his blinker to follow the sedan down a gravel road.

*Good thing I haven’t thought to wash my car in a while,* he thought to himself, suddenly grateful that he wasn’t on his bike. The radio fuzzed as his phone faded in and out of data range. He switched off the entire car stereo in frustration, leaning his elbow on the steering wheel. The cloud of dust left behind from Simon’s car helped him to follow where the man had gone, and Klavier eased his car ahead, trying to convince himself that he could muster up the courage to talk to Herr Blackquill at his next stop. He made the solemn promise to himself as he drove, squinting through the cloud of aggravated dust in front of him.

Just as he turned around the last bend, however, he had to slam on the brakes.

He hadn’t expected the chainlink fence in front of him, nor the manned barrier arm. He’d pushed against the steering wheel in his mad attempt to stop before crashing through the arm, cringing at how hard he’d stomped on the brakes. The man in the booth next to the barrier arm had covered his face with one arm, as if waiting for Klavier to smash through the arm and into the electrified fence. The car jerked to a halt mere inches away from the red and white arm, however, rocking back and forth in the aftermath. Klavier managed to pry one eye open, and upon seeing that he’d caused no damage, he relaxed, taking in his surroundings.

And, immediately, he felt his entire midsection sink to the axels of his car.

“Sir!” The guard yelled from the outside, but Klavier was too busy staring ahead of him, at the sign etched into the large brick building in front of him.

The sign, reading *Los Angeles Women’s Correctional Facility,* stared back at him. The fence stretched for miles. Had he paid more attention to the gravel drive, he would have—*should have*—noticed the fence earlier, especially with the barbed wire circling in and out of the linked peaks. Daunting, the building stood in front of him with an air of indifference, and Klavier shivered.

On the direct other side of the fence, a paved driveway wormed its way down a hill and into a parking lot with only a few spaces available for visitors. A quick glance down to the parking lot, and Klavier spied Simon’s sedan taking up one of the spaces, and the man walking inside.

*A perp?* Klavier thought to himself, but another glance to the man made him rethink his angle.

He recognized the posture immediately, the walk toward the prison obvious but slowed, as if he were trying to forget into where he was entering. Simon’s hands were shoved deep into his pockets, and head turned to take in the fenced-in recreation area. As he walked forward, he turned his head up, and Klavier knew he was trying to picture what life would be like inside the walls, where life turned into a barred routine. Taka sat atop the sedan, his talons holding onto the bike rack Klavier figured rarely got used for anything else. Simon drew closer to the entrance to the visitor’s center, and something in him…changed. Whenever Klavier had seen him in public, Simon Blackquill had walked with head held high, shoulders squared, and jaw tight. Now, as he neared the doors that led inside, he seemed…small. As if his entire being was tired just from trying to imagine life on the inside.
Klavier recognized it immediately because he’d made the same walk himself, trying to gain an audience with his brother.

The headlines from the end of the ‘Dark Age of the Law’ came swarming back into his mind, one headline about an Aura Blackquill, arrested for a felony charge of false imprisonment.

His shoulders relaxed, and he went limp in his seat, staring as the samurai disappeared behind the large steel door with ‘VISITOR ENTRY’ painted in white.

He felt any reservations he’d held against the man disappear, replaced only with frustration and foolishness. He’d recognized the posture immediately because he’d seen himself in Blackquill’s gait, dreading each step toward the facility, yet determined to visit his sibling. Klavier almost expected to see Blackquill exit almost as quickly as he’d entered, turned away by his sister.

“Sir!” The guard outside his door yelled louder, this time rapping on the glass. Klavier jumped in surprise, crying out as he took in the man’s exasperated look. He scrambled to roll the window down, coming face to face with the man who stared at him as though he were crazy. “What are you doing?” He demanded, and Klavier sputtered, looking from Blackquill’s car, to him, and back again.

“I’m—,” following a friend sounded too suspicious, as did lost, so he clamped his teeth into his lower lip before either could sneak out. The truth, stalking a co-worker so I know he’s a good man, would probably land him in a detention center down the hill. A pang of jealousy tightened his chest when Simon didn’t emerge from the prison as quickly as Klavier always had, and he deflated. A part of him knew he should be happy for the sibling relationship, not envious. He held on to that optimistic side of him, forcing a smile to his face. “I just wanted to know what was down this road.”

The guard sat back, crossing his arms over his chest. He bore a look of disbelief, only halfheartedly masked by curiosity. “Well? Did you find what you were looking for?”

Klavier turned back to the prison, to the visitor’s door, and back to Taka, who had turned his head over his shoulder to stare at the blonde man. This time, instead of cringing away, Klavier grinned.

“I think I did,” he nodded, and tipped his cap. “Entschuldigung. I’ll get out of your hair.”

Chapter End Notes

A fun note: bitch-dono is a phrase my beta found and has not stopped saying since. Being able to write it in to this is my ode to her, and all of her patience as i scream at my computer. Lemme know what you think!
Chapter Summary

Look at the wake  
From the stardust pouring from your eyes.  
It's no mistake,  
You are perfect,  
You are perfect in my mind, and you won't fade away

Chapter Notes

Hey everyone! A month to the day, I don't know how, but I'm excited to get this one out here. We'll get the ball rolling soon, I've been wanting to write this for so long, and I'm having a great time. I hope you all are liking it, too, let me know what you think in the kudos/comments!

((Btw, thank you for getting this to ~300 hits in just three chapters, you all are amazing ;A;))  
((P.P.S., this was originally supposed to be two chapters, but it would be too uneven, so here we are, 21 expected chapters))

See the end of the chapter for more notes

The easy, swaying rhythm of a radio a few apartment balconies over swayed in the distance, leaving Klavier feeling more secure in the Los Angeles breeze. There weren't many houses or apartments with windows open in the late December evening, but right now, as he waited for Kristoph to come home, he sat with legs extended onto the rail and hands folded in his lap. He'd flown in from Germany a few hours prior, and luckily, still remembered where Kristoph's first apartment was.

Letting himself in, he'd walked past the Christmas decorations and law books scattered haphazardly together. Somewhere, somehow, he knew that his brother meant to decorate for the holidays, however, he doubted that the busy man remembered to do so before his brother would come home. Of course he'd called Kristoph as soon as he'd landed, but a text waiting for him had some sort of excuse for the elder's tardiness. Now he listened to John Denver in the distance, trying to squash the feeling of inadequacy that he'd felt since their parents passed. A part of him whispered that, were he more important to the man, Kristoph wouldn't have made an excuse. He would just be there.

It was a feeling he'd become used to in his time, like Kristoph only really looked after him because he needed to, not because he wanted to, or genuinely cared about him. It wasn't like they'd been particularly close, but no matter what happened, what he did, or where he went, he always felt... well, like Kristoph was in the background, trying to tell him what to do, or what to say, or how to act. The ongoing frustration never ceased to nag at the back of his mind, no matter how many unpublished songs he held in his notebooks, or how loud he turned his stereo in an attempt to drown out the voices.

When he'd first left on tour, he'd tried to make it home for Christmas, Kristoph's birthday, and the anniversary of their parents' death. He'd been so intentional with his actions that he'd strained the
band’s relationship in the first few years, but now, almost six years after the fact, he’d relaxed it to one visit a year. Of course he and Kristoph kept in loose touch in the interim. Even then, ‘loose’ was used in the exact definition of the word. Klavier’s band would always keep his attention, and Kristoph, despite his adamant promises that his work was second only to his brother, would always prefer to stay late at the officer rather than suffer through small talk.

Although, lately, Kristoph had been acting...differently. He’d called Klavier more often, and every time, had asked him about his law career. Klavier didn’t want to admit it, but he seemed...relieved every time Klavier assured him he wanted to focus on music at the moment. The conversation would always turn from a slight strain back to forced small talk, and eventually, Kristoph would hang up. The phone calls were tedious at best, and over and over again Daryan would tell Klavier to ignore them, but every time, he’d had to smile, excuse himself, and sneak out on to a balcony or into a bathroom. He’d missed Kristoph’s calls before, and, if he were behind honest, the ten awkward minutes were better than months of guilt emanating from the small apartment. It was so potent, sometimes, that he could almost smell it.

I’m starting to wonder if anything will ever change, he thought to himself. I thought that being on tour would prove to him that I’m grown up, but...

Vaguely, he wondered if he would ever really appear ‘grown up’ in his brother’s eyes.

“Klavier,” his brother called from behind him, but he kept staring forward, pretending like he couldn’t hear him. Petty, yes, but it gave Klavier the smallest hint of power over the man.

“Klavier.”

“Klavier!” The voice tried for the third time, and the man in question started, jumping out of his memory. Suddenly, he wasn’t sitting on the apartment’s tiny balcony, trying to pretend like the cheap lawn chair was comfortable. He wasn’t even outside in the Los Angeles chill.

He was sitting in a soba shop, arms crossed over themselves, sunken into a booth in front of a sticky table and air conditioning blaring. John Denver played in the awkward silence, and he stared at the woman in front of him. Dee had insisted on meeting him in person to try and figure out some details, and Klavier’s time on twitter following—not stalking, he thought to himself, I’m not stalking Herr Blackquill. I’m not—Simon made him curious about the shop. Not that Simon’s twitter was particularly specific about his life; honestly, the man went on there only to @ other businesses in the hopes he’d receive some sort of discount or another.

He hadn’t seen a mention of their current location recently, and justified trying to catch him there as a morbid curiosity to try the famed soba. Dee had agreed, probably just happy to finally meet in person, and Klavier had gratefully sent her the address. He stared at her now, the young woman tapping her chopsticks on the side of the bowl. She couldn’t have been older than 32, dark black hair pulled into a high ponytail. Her other hand tapped the table in the same sort of rhythm, as if she were trying to write a song herself. Klavier knew she could, she had a few albums laying around that he’d always promised to listen to. Her gray blazer contrasted against dark skin made the man feel wildly underdressed; he’d come straight from a tattoo consultation, and hardly remembered to even throw on the flannel button up he currently wore. She’d already seen his ripped jeans, and hoped that she could forgive him in her heart of hearts.

“Sorry,” he cleared his throat. “You were saying?”

“I was saying that you look smaller than the last time I saw you,” she repeated herself, chopsticks still rapping against the bowl. “Are you okay?”

“Ja,” he muttered, finally reaching forward and taking his own chopsticks in his hand. “I’m fine, I
promise.” She pursed her lips, into a thin line and raised her eyebrows, but returned to her udon in silence.

“Sure,” she nodded. “It’s just…” she trailed off, chewing her noodles in silence before she leaned both elbows on the table in front of them. “…Well, the Gavinners broke off, and you had your law career, but from what it sounds like, you haven’t done anything with that lately, either. Then, three years later, I get a random call from Klavier Gavin saying that he wants to be in a metal band. A girl’s gotta think.”

Klavier dismissed her with a wave of his hand. “My heart has always been in my guitar solos, you know that.”

“Not to mention that he doesn’t want to sing,” she added over him. “You still haven’t explained that part to me.”

“I have so,” he indignantly set down his chopsticks. “My guy is better than me.”

“Probably better at singing,” she conceded, and before Klavier could sputter, she pressed on. “But this guy needs to sell the crowd, too. Not just sing well.”

“We’ll work on it,” Klavier mumbled. “Besides, it’s not like this is pop punk. Metal fans are different.”

“Not as different as you’d think,” Dee mused.

Klavier blinked. “What do you know about the metal scene?”

Dee fixed him with a look. “More than you think. You think the only metal band with black members was Living Colour?”

Klavier bit his lip. He’d always thought that her albums had been R&B, or maybe a few rap albums.

“I guess I just…assumed you played R&B.”

“Mhm,” she nodded, slurping her noodles again. “Of course you did. It’s fine.”

Klavier bit his lips together, “Sorry.”

“So, tell me about this mystery man,” she changed the subject. “He’s gonna have to sell your band, especially if you’re gonna be taking the back seat.”

“It’s not a back seat,” he argued. “Unless you’re trying to tell me Jimmy Page took the back seat of Led Zeppelin.”

Dee fixed him with a look, and rolled her eyes. “Either way. You’re not making my job easy, I hope you know.”

“That’s why I called you,” Klavier sighed, sitting back in the booth and sinking down like a child. “I know you can make it work.”

Right as Dee opened her mouth to start on another point, a moving figure in his peripheral vision caught him, and he turned his gaze just in time to see Simon Blackquill stalking toward the door. His eyes widened, and he shrunk down further, suddenly regretting leaving his cap at home.

“Klavier?” She cut herself off, eyebrow raising on her forehead.
“Shh!” He held his chopsticks up to his lips and gave her an exasperated look.

“Are you—?”

“Shh!” Klavier repeated. He sank lower in his seat as the door jingled open, and gave a pointed look from Blackquill to Dee. She gave him a look and turned over her shoulder to see Simon stalking toward the counter. Confused, she turned back to Klavier right as he turned his head away, almost as if he wanted to sink into the ground. In all the time she’d known Klavier Gavin, he’d never shied away from someone…

Unless he was avoiding asking them a difficult question, she thought to herself, and her eyes widened.

“Him?” She hissed as the man reached the counter. Klavier’s lips pressed into a tight, distressed line, and he gave her one quick nod.

“Bucky!” Simon called as he approached, slamming one hand down on the counter. Klavier jumped at the sudden noise, and Dee’s face turned from incredulity to intrigue. “Where are you?”

“I’m-a comin’, I’m-a comin’,” the slightly inebriated call came from the other side of the kitchen, and only moments later, Bucky Whet emerged, pink chubby cheeks pouted out in a frown. “Whassup, Simey? Yer lookin’ like you missed some sleep.”

“It’s been a while since I’ve been here,” Simon cut right to the chase. “I’m here to see if you’ve gotten any better.”

Dee quietly slurped her noodles, watching as Klavier Gavin slowly shrank down. For a man with usually such a large ego, she had to admit, watching him try to shrink down into nothing was certainly entertaining.

“What can I get fer ya?” Bucky leaned on the counter opposite Simon, trying but failing to make himself look intimidating.

“Soba,” Simon barked. “As always.”

“Got yer order right here,” Bucky shot back, reaching under the counter for a Tupperware container holding Simon’s usual order, spicy peanut soba. “That’ll be $9.15.”

“I think you mean $7.78, I gave you a foolish mention.”

“Mayhaps,” Bucky tried not to sway as he argued. “But you sure didn’t say anything nice.”

“I said that Whet Soba would be adequate for my lunch, what more do you want?”

“Maybe tell yer followers they should eat here, somethin’…”

“Humph,” Simon scoffed, standing up straight and crossing his arms over themselves. Dee figured he must have stood over six feet tall, and she imagined what it would be like to stand next to him, her own 5’4” stature looking punitive in comparison. “You’re lucky you get anything from me at all with your second-rate soba.”

“Second rate?” Bucky exclaimed. “Yer breakin’ me heart!”

“Then stop breaking my wallet!” Simon countered, slamming a $10 bill on the counter. “Give me my dinner, and keep the change.”
Without another word, Simon reached across the counter, grabbing the to-go bag and turning on his heel before Bucky could complain any further. Dee and Klavier shared a look, Klavier’s crossed arms finally loosing around his middle in relief. Simon passed their booth by a few steps, stopped, and turned once more to the owner.

“And what do you mean, I don’t say anything nice? Gavin-dono here has only been following me for a few days, and he’s already in here.” Klavier’s face turned white as a sheet, and he froze, only looking up to see that Simon wasn’t staring at him, but over his head. When Bucky only gave him an exasperated groan instead of a half-baked attempt at a debate, Simon returned the groan and continued his exit.

“That’s him?” Dee hissed again, and Klavier nodded again. She gave him a wide-eyed ‘are-you-kidding-me’ expression, and gestured toward the door. “What are you doing, then? Go ask him right now!”

“I—“ Klavier sputtered, looking from the door, too Dee, and back again. “I can’t here,”

“Klavier Gavin,” frustration flared in her stomach, and she jabbed her chopsticks at him. “I have enough work to do to make him approachable, do not make my job any harder.”

“Dee—,”

“March, young man, or I’m out,” she ordered, pointing toward the door. Klavier turned from her to the door once, and grimaced.

“Fine,” he muttered, pushing out of the booth and out the door. He pushed against the glass and out into the dry heat, forgetting to brace himself from the harsh change from air conditioning. He took a moment to glance around before he eyed Blackquill struggling with a key into his sedan.

Thank you, Klavier thought to the higher power, and moved forward. Just invite him to the studio. We’ll figure it out from there. Just…just get him there, Gavin!

“Herr Blackquill!” He called, raising a hand in a wave. Simon, seemingly figuring out his lock, swung the door open, and lifted his head to look at the approaching man.

“Gavin-dono,” He nodded in greeting. “Did you enjoy your soba?”

“What?” Klavier asked, completely sidetracked.

“Soba,” Simon deadpanned, gesturing to the box on top of his car. Now that the door was open, Taka burst through, taking his normal perch on the man’s shoulder. “You were just in a soba shop.”

“Right, right,” Klavier dismissed the thought. “It was fine.”

“That hairdo is ‘fine’, I need to know if you liked Bucky’s soba. He’ll keep giving me discounts if I keep bringing new customers in.”

A sudden wave of indignant stubbornness flashed through Klavier’s mind, and he straightened. The thought of Klavier’s new look being treated as a ‘mistake’ sickened him to his core. “My hairdo is more than ‘fine’, it’s cool as hell.”

Simon seemed to take the thought at face value, but his expression never wavered. “So you liked the soba.”

Klavier threw his hands in the air. “Yes, fine, the soba was good,” he rolled his eyes. “I wanted to
“Thank you,” Simon quickly pulled out his phone, already halfway opening twitter. “You’ve helped me prove an important point, Gavin-dono.”

Absently, Klavier’s phone buzzed in his pocket, and Klavier felt all of his patience thin.

“Herr Blackquill,” he tried again, and this time, Simon looked up with a quirked eyebrow, slipping his phone into his pocket. Klavier opened his mouth a few times, dumbly trying to think of how to ask his question now that he’d been so wildly derailed. Simon waited a few moments before he nodded, taking the soba from atop his car and setting it inside.

“Good talk,” he commented, guiding Taka in before he started to situate himself to enter.

“I have something I need help with,” Klavier pushed all of the words out in the hopes that he wouldn’t lose what little attention span Simon seemed to have. Simon stopped, turning his gaze from his steering wheel and back over the roof of his car. “Something…important. And I need your opinion.

“Something…not work related?” Simon gave him a disapproving look. “News of your leave traveled quickly.”

“It’s kind of work related,” he decided with a shrug. “I just need your opinion. When are you free?”

His clarification did little to assuage the other man, whose eyes only narrowed under his thick bangs. “This isn’t something we can take care of right now?”

“No.”

With a sigh, Simon turned his attention away from the man in front of him to the other side of the street, weighing his options. Klavier held his breath while the other man considered, hoping against hope that he hadn’t just messed up everything.

“I’m free tonight,” Simon decided, turning back to Klavier. “But I’m only doing this because you’ve done me a large favor that I’m returning. Got it?”

“Yes!” Klavier pumped his fist in the air before pressing flat hands together in front of his chest. “Thank you, Herr Blackquill, thank you.”

Simon rolled his eyes at the excitement, calling after the man who’d turned to re-enter the soba shop. “Where are we meeting?”

“I’ll DM you!” Klavier yelled over his shoulder, ripping open the door and pressing himself against the wall inside, just out of Simon’s eyesight. He ignored Dee’s look, opting instead to open his phone. A notification awaited him, one that he opened right away.

@bitch-dono: if all of you were more like @the-achtung-baby and came to @whetsoba we’d probably get along better.

A wave of anxiety rolled through Klavier’s stomach, and he gave Dee a hopeful thumbs up.

I just can’t mess this up.
Klavier and Dee’s meeting ended shortly after, and Klavier sped away home on his motorcycle as quickly as possible. His promise to clean the entryway had been all but forgotten in the rush to get back to Dee, ask Simon, and schedule a tattoo consultation. He spent the rest of the day moving guitars from one area to another, occasionally peeking in one to see if he wanted to play it. Now that he had no day job, he knew he had more time to play around on one of his instruments, but every time he felt compelled to try, the ProMod called him from the studio. The only exception he made from the group was for the bass he unloaded second to last, his scratch track itching at the back of his mind. He set down the bass’ case with both hands, taking a quick look around the studio. He’d done a decent job of cleaning in the few hours he’d had to himself, and his messages to Simon had confirmed that the samurai would show up around 7:00…

Klavier bit his lips together. A few minutes spent trying to lay down the bass track wouldn’t hurt… right?

He turned to the bass amp sitting next to the one in front of which he’d sat an entire night, flipping on the switch and grabbing one of his many cables. His chest rumbled when he turned on the amp and hit the E string, reverberations coursing through him.

To him, it felt as though the bass was slowly but surely bringing him back to life, the low notes acting like shock paddles to his ribcage. Bass had never been his forte, but he’d always insisted on keeping a few around, just in case. His fingers, unused to finger plucking, took a few clumsy attempts before they began to behave the way he wanted them to. Once he remembered how to play, he pulled up his current scratch track on his computer, and started playing along.

In retrospect, he knew he should have left the bass alone. He was in the middle of recording the scratch track when his phone started ringing, and he jumped back with a short yelp. Immediately frustrated, he turned to his phone only to see a picture of Herr Blackquill glaring at him from over a stack of files.

His stomach dropped and he swung the bass’s neck around so it pointed at the ground, freeing up his front. The clock on his lock screen read 7:15, and he quietly cursed to himself. Taking a deep breath to sound a little more composed, he grabbed the phone and hit ‘answer’.

“Guten Abend, Herr Blackquill, I’m sorry I missed your ring.”

“Someone let me in,” he answered. “I’ve been knocking on your door for ten minutes.”

Klavier’s face flushed, and he flipped the bass amp off. “Entschuldging. I’ll let you in right now.”

“I’d appreciate that,” Simon agreed, and Klavier hung up, unplugging the bass amp and tossing it aside. He toed open the studio door and turned to his front door, grabbing the handle and yanking it inside. The outside light flooded inside, and with a pang of embarrassment, Klavier realized he must have looked like a cave dweller with his lights off and bass haphazardly swung around his shoulder. Simon still stood with the phone to his ear, but he moved it away from his face and pressed the ‘off’ button without breaking eye contact. He wore a backpack over one shoulder, his usual work clothes traded for a black hoodie and workout pants. Klavier only stood a few inches shorter than the man, but in that moment, he felt smaller than usual.

“Herr Blackquill,” he nodded. “I apologize, I was…preoccupied.”

“I heard,” Simon slipped the phone into his coat pocket. “It sounded different than your usual pop punk hullabaloo.”

“Hullabaloo?” Klavier repeated, stepping aside to allow for another to fit through the doorway. “So
you have heard of the Gaviners.”

“I have,” Simon nodded, taking Klavier’s silent invitation and entering the penthouse. For a moment, Klavier wondered what it would be like to step inside Simon’s head, to see his home for the first time. He wondered how much Simon actually saw; usually, he tried keeping his home clean, but cleanliness had been his last priority until three hours prior. He hoped he’d done an adequate job. “It’s not my thing.”


“No, thank you. I ate on the way here.”

“I-I see,” he repeated.

“What did you need an opinion on?”

Klavier straightened, suddenly all business. A shot of anxiety coursed through him as he realized he hadn’t put together what he was going to say. 

*Oh, help,* he thought. *I need to stop always wasting time.*

Had he not felt more alive trying to come up with a bass line, he would have believed that sentiment. As it were, he pushed the memory of Kristoph’s chiding away, and forced his lips up into a smile. 

“Achtung!” He snapped, hoping the familiar catchphrase would make him more comfortable. “Please, step into my studio.”

One of Simon’s eyebrows rose under his bangs, but he turned and stepped into the room anyway. It might have been a bedroom in a different life, but the pop star had refurbished it to absorb sound and outfitted it with a few recording devices. Two amplifiers, an electric drum set, and full keyboard were loosely arranged around the room under guitar hooks lining the walls. Only two guitars nestled in stands stared back at him, one a black-on-black guitar, and the other a deep plum bass. In the far corner, a small cubicle of dampening glass stood around a microphone hanging from the ceiling, a set of headphones resting atop the device. He took an adequate step inside and turned, only to see the other man gesturing to the desk shoved into the opposite corner of the room from the microphone booth. Simon regarded the chair with a hint of hesitation before he took the offered chair, hanging his backpack over the back rest.

“All right, what are you going to assail my ears with?” He asked as he sat, eyeing the small mixing board and speakers. Klavier fixed him with a quizzical look, grabbing the seat opposite Simon and sliding one leg over another.

“What are you talking about?” He asked, leaning back in his chair.

“Your music,” Simon nodded to the already-open mix on his computer. “…Did you not ask me here to give you an opinion on it?”

Turning from the computer, to the mix board, and back to Simon, Klavier quickly waved his hands in front of his face. “*Nein, nein, nein!*” He clarified quickly. “I have a manager for something like that,” he clarified. Feeling a bit of his patience wither away, Simon crossed his arms over his chest.

“Then what is this about? I don’t have all night.”

Klavier pursed his lips, placing both feet on the ground and leaning forward. Simon recognized the metaphorical wheels turning in the man’s head. *If he hadn’t scored me big points with Bucky earlier,
I wouldn’t have to sit through this, he thought.

“Herr Blackquill,” Klavier started out rocky, as if he were still stringing together a sentence in his head. “Has anyone…” he trailed off, waving a hand in the air. He’s nervous, Simon noted to himself, forcing a calmer air to his posture, bringing both arms lower on his chest. If he kept his normal air of hostility, he would probably never leave, but acting too familiar was out of the question. “Has anyone told you that you have a good singing voice?”

Out of all the things Simon had prepared himself for, he had to admit that he hadn’t seen that coming. It was everything he could do not to break his apathetic stare.

“Not just good,” Klavier corrected. “An amazing singing voice?”

Stop that, he thought to the creeping flush that came to his cheeks. Resisting the urge to reach up and cover his mouth, he bit into the soft flesh of his lower lip. His hands itched, but he forced them to stay firmly attached to his biceps.

“I don’t sing,” he mashed out. The sudden change in expectation from answering questions about Klavier to himself left a terrible taste in his mouth. Noticing the unimpressed expression on the other man’s face, he grimaced. “Who told you?”

“No one did,” Klavier answered.

“Someone had to,” he demanded, leaning forward. “Who was it?” When the man didn’t respond, Simon uncrossed his arms and placed them on the desk between them. “Was it Edgeworth-dono?”

“Nein—,”

“Then it was one of the guards,” Simon glared. “I knew it, those bastards.” Klavier moved to interject, but Simon stood. “Forget you heard anything.”

“Wait!” Klavier held up a hand, a note of desperation in his voice. Simon, caught off guard, turned his attention back to him. A moment passed between them before he added a quiet, “Please. Wait. Let me explain.”

After a moment’s consideration, he sat again, nostrils flared. When Klavier looked up again, he couldn’t help but notice a flush of red on the man’s face. “You have sixty seconds,” Simon mashed out between gritted teeth. Klavier pressed both hands together, forcing himself to keep eye contact.

“I was at the office late a few days ago,” he began. “I—well, I happened to overhear you in the hallway.” Across the desk, Simon pursed his lips, and Klavier tried to ignore the deep intake of breath. “It wasn’t anything major, I just…” How do I even begin? You’re the answer to the question I’ve been asking myself ever since the Gavinners disbanded? I think we’re musical soulmates and I want to birth your voice into the spotlight? “Well, I happened to hear the music you were listening to, and it sounded like you’re into metal, too.” As if he’d forgotten that he’d already breathed in, Simon did so again, and Klavier pressed forward. “And, as you know, I just took a leave of absence, and I’ve been wanting to get in to the music industry again.”

For all the stories he’d heard, Klavier had just assumed that Simon liked to bicker, but now, the two simply stared at each other until the former broke the silence.

“And, well, I wanted to ask you to join me.”

Silence again. Trying and failing to ignore the vein poking through Simon’s forehead, Klavier pursed his own lips together. Scheiße, Klavier thought to himself. I’ve asked how many people out
on a date, one would have thought this would be the same!

“Join you?” Simon parroted. “And do what, prosecute the people who try to rip off your music?”

“I mean join my band,” Klavier pressed. “As a singer. A lead singer.”

“I don’t sing.”

“I could help you with your stage presence,” he offered. “You wouldn’t have to do anything but show up, open your mouth, and let everyone enjoy the gift you’ve been given.”

“I—don’t—sing,” Simon insisted, this time through grit teeth, and Klavier felt his stomach drop. The man’s eyes were serious. More serious than he would have thought. Frustration flared in his stomach, and he pressed further.

“Why not?” Klavier countered, sounding much like a spoiled child. “You fit the bill of a metal singer, you’re tall, dark, and most of all, you put emotion into your voice. You’re everything a band could—and should—want—,”

Simon pushed himself to his feet. “I’ve had enough,” he said. “Your sixty seconds are up.”

Feeling much like he’d had a rug pulled from beneath his feet, Klavier stared at the chair for a moment. It wasn’t until Simon’s boots stomped out to the hardwood outside that he jumped into action, pushing away from the desk and into the threshold.

“He, wart’ mal schnell!” Klavier called after the man, though his hand had already closed around the doorknob. How dramatic, Kristoph’s voice muttered in his head, and Klavier grit his teeth against the dig. “Herr Blackquill—,”

“Forget you heard anything,” He ordered over his shoulder, and, forgetting he was indoors, not in a courtroom, Klavier swung his fist into the wall in front of which he was standing.

“I will not!” He insisted, and Simon stood straight, turning his head over his shoulder. For the first time in years, Klavier didn’t care what he saw staring back at him. He didn’t care that the Klavier Gavin staring up at him had lost almost twenty pounds over the course of the past few months, or that he’d buzzed his hair off without realizing, or that he looked much like a pathetic shadow of the man he’d once grown comfortable being. “Simon Blackquill, you have a gift, and you can deny me all you want, but I will not let you deny your talents! You should be proud of it, not hiding it in an empty prosecutor’s office!” Simon stopped at that, and Klavier thought of the man making his way into the correctional facility. His heart ached, and for a moment, he saw himself three years ago standing next to him. He recognized the almost-defeated look to the man, how he set his shoulders a little too squarely, how he forced the focus into his eyes…

His next words were a long shot, but he heard himself speak anyway.

“I know what you are feeing,” he said quietly, and Simon’s head rose. “Trying to bury your feelings in legal work leads to nothing, Herr Blackquill. It works for a while, yes, but…it doesn’t take away what happened to you.” He let his arm fall to his side. “That feeling of having nothing left…it doesn’t leave. The doubt, the anger, the fear, I know what they feel like,” his hands curled into fists at his sides, and he squeezed his eyes shut. “Perhaps…perhaps the road I’m going down won’t make it go away, either, but at least no one will expect you to try to forget it.”

He turned slowly, swinging his head around to stare down the man at the end of the hall. “What do you know about forgetting anything?”
“I—,” Klavier started, but Simon stalked forward, stretching to his full height. Klavier felt his heart jump into his throat, but he forced himself to hold his ground.

“What could you possibly know about the anger I feel?” He ground out. “This anger isn’t something that I can just…” he struggled for words, pursing his lips together. “I can’t just wish it away, or sing it away, Gavin. I’m not some sort of man that runs away from it. I know what happened to me was wrong, but it still doesn’t mean that I didn’t sit and rot away in a jail cell for seven years before someone found a use for me. I never forgot about Cykes-dono in that cage, and the only way she will heal is if I forget this anger I feel.” He finally relented, as if he’d noticed the look in Klavier’s eyes. He pursed his lips together, turning away. Klavier watched him carefully, then opened his mouth to speak. “Silence,” Simon held up a hand this time. “Do not bring this up again.”

With that, he turned on his heel, and stalked toward the door. Klavier closed his eyes right before the door slammed in his face, letting the force of the gesture reverberate in his head. The silence that followed crushed him.

As he stood there, it pressed down on his shoulders, his head, his chest. It felt like it would soon consume him, or strip away everything he’d worked so hard to pull together.

That’s it, he thought to himself. That was my chance, and I missed it.

The mask of rockstar Klavier Gavin, mask though it was, had felt good again. Like slipping back into a favorite pair of jeans, it had felt…right. Safe. Comfortable.

And now…?

Keeping a stiff upper ip, Klavier turned back to the studio. He’d been so confident, so sure that Simon would agree, that he hadn’t taken the time to think about what would happen if the man had actually declined him. He fell back into the desk chair, letting a long sigh escape his lips as he did so. Now that the mask had been so quickly ripped from him, he wasn’t sure what he was going to do.

I don’t have a plan B, he thought to himself. Maybe…maybe Dee wasn’t so off base, maybe I can sing again. It’s not like the Gavinners set the stage for how the rest of my musical career will go.

Leaning back in his chair, he stared at the popcorn ceiling.

Or maybe it will, he thought after a moment. He refused to be so distraught after a simple ‘no’. It wasn’t like he was unfamiliar with a hard ‘no’, but then again, missing out on a date compared to something that he’d been so sure would lead to more healing…

Why doesn’t he want to sing? Klavier thought. With a voice like that, it can’t be stage fright…can it?

Frustrated, he turned back to Simon’s chair.

Had he been a little more patient, dammit, I would’ve come up with something better to say—

He stopped mid-thought, staring at the back of the seat. He blinked a few times, frowning, trying to get his brain to work again.

Simon had entered with a bag, yet he’d forgotten it in his haste to leave. Annoyed at the prospect of having to see the man who’d rejected him so soon again, Klavier rolled his eyes. If I ever saw him again, it would be too soon, he thought. It’s not embarrassing, but…
He sighed. Being reminded of the rejection was enough to make him feel like he just needed to crawl into himself. He pushed himself to his feet, still staring at the bag. The further around the desk he moved, the more he could see that it was slightly ajar, as if it were beckoning for him to take a look inside.

*Stop it, Klavier, he thought, turning away. I’ll swing by the P.O. tomorrow and drop it off for him. I will not look inside.*

Trying to move as if the past half hour hadn’t happened, he took up his bass again, flipping on the amp. It took a moment to blink to life.

Klavier turned back to the seat.

The bag hadn’t moved; it just sat there.

*No,* he thought to himself, moving his hands back into a playing position. The sound his fingers made echoed through the pedal at his feet and then through the amplifier, and then echoed in Klavier’s mind. Whatever train of thought he’d had left, and he stared at the wall for a moment, almost begging for it to return. If Simon wasn’t going to join in his project, he would have to keep moving without him. He wouldn’t let himself become codependent on anyone.

And yet…

After a moment of staring at the wall, his shoulders drooped. *Stupid, empty brain,* he thought, turning over his shoulder at the bag once again. To make matters even worse, it had been left *open.*

*Does he want everyone to know what he’s working on?* Klavier thought with a scoff, turning back to the amp. If inspiration had abandoned him, he could always depend on discipline.

A moment later his head whipped back around. He stared at the notebook. It almost *called* to him, like it was waiting on his permission to even exist. With a sigh, Klavier removed the bass from his shoulder and stepped toward the bag, firmly taking the zipper in one hand and steadying the back with the other before he pulled it tightly shut. He nodded to himself and turned on his heel back into his kitchen. He did his best to ignore the mess around him, trying not to think of what Simon must have thought when he saw how Klavier had been living. He ripped open cupboards around the perimeter of his kitchen. There had to be something to eat, even if it was small. If he didn’t force himself into some sort of good habit, he would slowly forget them, and his metal career—however short it would be—would leave him half dead or burnt out.

*And at that point, what good would it do me to return to work?* He thought to himself. He knew the thought should have scared him, but in that moment, he didn’t care. *This is what I’ve decided to do,* he tried again with more certainty. *I could never face Herr Forehead again if I turned back with my tail between my legs.* *I’ll do this thing, even if I’m doing it by myself.*

Klavier paused at the fridge, his eyes locked on a questionable block of cheese. *I wouldn’t have to do this if Herr Blackquill would just listen to me,* he added, feeling peevish. *He didn’t even tell me why he doesn’t want to sing in front of people.* *If I could just…prove to him, somehow, that he had a gift…*

The notebook called to him again, and he slammed the fridge shut in frustration. *No,* that was a Kristoph move. He wouldn’t encroach on someone’s private business just to prove a point.

But, dammit, was it really encroaching on private business if he was *right?*

Frustrated, Klavier turned away from the fridge and leaned against it, arms crossed over his chest.
His eyes, traitors though they were, darted back to the studio.

Moments later, Klavier ripped open the zipper again and snatched the notebook out. He sat, cross-legged, on his studio floor, holding the small black book in both hands. They shook, and he took a deep breath. *Just a peek,* he ordered himself. *If it has nothing to do with anything, I won't bring this up any more, and I'll call Dee, and I'll just have to sing instead of lead guitar.)*

A part of him fell at the resolution, and he held it tighter.

*But…*

He set it down on the floor in front of him.

*If I'm right, and he’s hurting as much as I am, I have to try again.*

Nodding to himself, he opened the book. Handwriting, small, neat, and in all capital letters, stared at him. It took him a moment to realize the slightly-larger capitals were the beginnings of sentences, and his eyes focused.

Klavier read one line.

Then, Klavier read another. And another. Soon, he ran out of words on the page. There weren’t many; Simon had written stanzas instead of paragraphs, leaving half the page blank. Klavier’s hand flipped the page over, and he leaned forward to try and see the page before it settled. When he’d reached the end of the thought, Simon had marked a large ‘X’.

Klavier read three complete thoughts before he forced himself to slam the book shut. He sat back, dumbfounded.

Simon could do so much more than just *sing.* He’d taken the anger he’d chided Klavier about, and turned it into poetry.

To leave him out of the band wouldn’t just be an unfortunate turn of events; it would be a disservice to the music industry. Klavier stared at the wall in front of him, finger mindlessly tapping on the notebook closed on the floor.

Mondays in the Prosecutor’s Office were a nightmare. Crime that had piled up over the weekend in turn piled up on government employees’ desks, and trying to catch up left most bitter and upset. Klavier had always made it a point to avoid the Prosecutor’s Office on Mondays as much as possible, but Simon’s bag had stared at him the entire day prior, and he’d be damned if he was going to tempt himself another day. He swung by his old office once again to see that Chief Prosecutor Edgeworth had wasted no time turning the space into a new office. He almost didn’t recognize the clean space, completely devoid of any changes he’d made, save for the large glass case. He smiled at it, taking one last look around the room. He’d emailed Dee the scratch track so far, excited to get the ball rolling. Logically, he knew that Herr Edgeworth had probably meant for him to take time off before delving into another project. And, in a way, he’d intended to. He hadn’t expected to find Simon at all, much less so soon.

As it were, he pulled his baseball cap lower and ducked back out.
The air conditioner chilled his skin as he moved through the bustling hallways, sweeping over his bare arms and into the tank top he wore. He stuck close to the left side of the hall. It was a natural traffic hazard, yes, but the tattoo outline covered by a large bandage was still tender, and he didn’t want anyone to bump into it. He tried walking with muted purpose; the less attention he could bring to himself, the better.

He had another reason for breaching traffic than his tattoo. He walked on the same side as Simon’s office. Since he didn’t remember exactly where Simon worked, he glanced up every so often to read the name plates. When he finally found it, he’d already moved past the office, and had to backpedal. For a moment, he stood outside the threshold, peeking at the man.

Simon wore his usual court attire. He was turned away from the door in an attempt to take notes on an upcoming case. Klavier had heard about the murder trial through the grapevine shortly before he left, and, given Simon’s posture, it was a hairy one. He hunched over the notes, his writing tempo frenetic. As loathe as Klavier was to be interrupted himself, the longer he held the forgotten bag, the heavier it felt.

He took a cautious look around before he slipped inside, closing the door behind himself.

Simon jumped at the sudden noise, turning in his seat and grabbing at the katana leaned against the desk.

“Whoa!” Klavier held up both hands in surrender, pressing himself to the door. Simon, halfway out of his chair, relaxed, though he still kept the sword in hand.

“What do you want?” He snapped.

“Peace, Herr Samurai,” Klavier tried keeping his eyes on the man himself, and not on the sword. “I did not mean to scare you.”

“Then you should have knocked,” Simon muttered, laying the sword on the desk and crossing his arms over his desk. “What is the meaning of this?”

Stepping forward, Klavier removed the bag from his shoulder and placed it in one of the chairs in front of Simon’s computer, where, presumably, guests could sit. He meant it as a peace offering, and hoped that it came off that way.

“You forgot that in your haste to leave my apartment,” Klavier explained, taking a cautious step away. Simon eyed it for a moment before turning back to the man in front of him.

“That’s it?” He asked.

“That’s it,” Klavier mirrored the man in his crossed-arm position. Simon’s eyes narrowed.

“You’re not going to waste my time with any more ‘join my band’ nonsense?”

It was all Klavier could do not to grin.

“You say that like you want me to ask you,” he goaded, but Simon rolled his eyes.

“I’d rather you not waste your pride,” he said, and Klavier nodded.

“Well then,” he shrugged. “I guess I’ll be going.”

He turned back to the door, moving little faster than a turtle. Take the bait, Herr Samurai, he...
pleaded in his head.

When he placed his hand on the doorknob and Simon didn’t say anything, he pursed his lips together. Plan B was so much less…favorable.

“Herr Samurai,” he turned back in to the office, and Simon’s lips quirked up in a smirk, as if he’d been awaiting the backtrack.

“Yes?” He asked. He’d moved so quietly, Klavier hadn’t noticed that he’d sat back down in the desk chair with bag in hand. Klavier blinked, pushing down the sudden anxiety in his throat.

“I…well, I dropped your bag when I first found it, and…”

Simon’s hand stopped on the zipper.

“It wasn’t shut all the way,” Klavier continued, forcing himself to stare at the man. “Your notebook fell out.”

Silence. If the man wasn’t so gifted, Klavier would have believed right then and there that he could only be silent.

“I…well, it fell open, and I—,”

Simon slammed his fist on the table in front of him, shaking the room so much that Klavier flinched.

“You saw what was inside?” He demanded. It wasn’t a yell, like Klavier had been expecting. No, it was little more than a whisper, though a part of Klavier wished Simon would just lay into him.

“I—,”

“Unbelievable,” Simon stood suddenly, pushing himself up. Klavier turned in time to meet his ablaze eyes. Subconsciously, he shrunk into himself. “I don’t know what your game is, Gavin-dono, but I’ve had enough.”

“What is your issue?” Klavier pressed, rising to Simon’s anger. “You shouldn’t have to forget what happened to you, Blackquill. Whether you like it or not, it happened, but you don’t have to keep pretending like everyone treats you the same way!”

Simon stiffened, his eyes flaring. “And what, you think because your brother betrayed you, you understand what I’m feeling?”

“No,” Klavier took a step forward. “I’m saying that I understand what it’s like to have the justice system fail. I’ve tried holding all that anger in, and—newsflash, Blackquill, it doesn’t work.” Simon’s fists balled at his sides, but Klavier kept pressing on. “I’m not going to force you to join me, I’m offering a way for you to get this anger out without hurting yourself or the people around you.”

“And what, you want me to join you because it would help feed your ego?” Simon countered.

“I want you to join me because you’d be great!” Klavier finally snapped, his voice rising in volume as he spoke. “You wrote yourself that you want to rewrite the stories people tell about you, right? You could do it, you and me!”

His words hung in the air, Simon’s mouth dropped slightly ajar. His eyes were wide for a moment before he snapped his mouth shut and crossed his arms over his chest again. Silence dragged between them for a long moment before Simon spoke.
“So you actually read my notebook,” his voice was calm, and Klavier felt all the blood rush from his face. He opened and closed his mouth a few times, trying to find words to say.

“Blackquill, I—,”

“Out,” Simon ordered, the syllable hanging heavy in the still office. Klavier floundered, taking a step forward, but Simon’s eyes flared. “Out!” He repeated, this time with venom in his voice. Klavier flinched back, snapping his mouth shut. The two stared at each other for a moment longer before he turned, grabbing the doorknob and yanking it open. He slammed it shut behind himself. He could feel the stares of the workers passing him by, but he kept his eyes on the ground in front of him.

Normally, Klavier knew he should have felt defeated, but something flared within his stomach. He pushed himself faster toward the parking garage; if he could get out before Simon inspected his notebook, he knew he would have one more chance. His resolve, something he’d missed ever since Kristoph’s arrest, reared its head.

When he rounded the corner back out to the parking garage, Klavier reached into his back pocket and pulled out the page he’d ripped from Simon’s notebook. Neat handwriting stared back at him, and the calluses on his fingers pulsed with his heartbeat.

‘I’ve read these stories a thousand times, now I’ll rewrite them all—you’re meddling in an anger you can’t control.’

The words stared at him, and he gripped the page tighter.

I’m sorry, Herr Blackquill, he thought to himself, swinging one leg over his motorcycle and shoving the page back into his jeans. But I’ve got one more trick up my sleeve.

Chapter End Notes

My beta and I have a headcanon that Simon once had to DD for Athena, Maya, and Ema, and in that car ride, ‘Wannabe’ came on. Everyone sang the chorus until it got to ‘I really, really, really wanna zig-a-zig-ahh’, and Simon deadpanned that.

tumblr
playlist
aesthetic
Walking Separate Ways

Chapter Summary

I tore my life in two and pulled the ends apart;
Are you seeing who you want to see cause I...?
I feel caught in the middle.

I'm both the sinner and the gentleman at heart,
And I accept that without questioning cause I,
I'm so sick of the riddle.

Chapter Notes

Two months later, I still am not dead!
I just...you know, cosplay, work, Breath of the Wild, getting into Brandon Sanderson's works...
It's been a busy couple of months, and it'll probably continue to be a busy couple of months before this is finished because I'll be MOVING into a new house, one that I own, and out of my current crappy position. So. I'll be heckin' busy, but I wanted to get this out before it got too crazy.
As always, S/O to those who have left comments/kudos on this; I'm not great at getting back to people, but I do feel so much more motivated to work on this if there's feedback. Literally this chapter came out after getting a random comment on it.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

“Very well done, Blackquill,” Miles Edgeworth greeted the younger of the two as he emerged from the courtroom. Simon stood with his hands stuffed deep in his pockets, watching as the defendant, one Butch Hare, was handcuffed. He watched as though he were a shadow, lips pursed into a thin line. Had Edgeworth not stepped up to him, he would have foolishly believed that he were invisible. Trying to remain small in a 6'1” body was never going to be an easy task, but he always liked to believe that he could try.

The rest of the week passed without so much of a peep from Klavier Gavin; a fact for which Simon Blackquill was grateful. A tug of rage—or maybe embarrassment—pulled at the side of his mind whenever he thought about the man. After Gavin had left him alone, he’d gingerly opened the notebook again, as if the words there would still be his alone, no outside tampering visible.

Of course he’d been let down.

His fingers had caught in a divot, and when he’d flipped the cover up, he’d stared at the butt end of a ripped out page.

At the time, his vision had gone blank. He’d thrown the journal against the wall, leaping out of his desk and taking off after Gavin at a jog, but by the time he’d reached the parking garage, the only thing left of the fop was the sound of a motorcycle roaring away. Simon still felt the rage in the back
of his mind, eating him from the inside out. It boiled in his stomach, threatening to consume him whole. He’d turned sharply on his heel and returned to his office, where he’d slammed his notebook in the bottom right drawer of his desk, trying not to think of the feeling that overwhelmed him every time he thought about Klavier’s invasion. It was a feeling he’d taken every precaution not to feel after walking free from prison.

He felt exposed.

Nothing else scared him quite as much as feeling exposed. His process to even sit and begin writing in that notebook was tedious. Had he not lived alone, or stayed late in the office, he was positive that he’d never write at all. First, he’d have to ensure no one was going to call, or text, or swing by his home. That part wasn’t hard. He’d never been particularly good with people, but spending time in prison certainly hadn’t helped his social life. Second, he’d have to quiet everything around him in the hopes that the silence would keep his senses keen enough to know if someone was approaching. Then, and only then, would he sit at his dining room table and scribble notes, back turned toward the corner in case his first two contingencies failed him. Redundant, yes, but at least then he could feel safe. The only difference from the ritual now versus two years ago, when he’d been imprisoned, was that he had the luxury of a chair and table. Back then, he’d had to use the concrete floor instead, impossibly curled up with his legs as close to his chest as they were going to get, squinting in the faint security light in the hall. For the first few years, he’d forgone the precautions, but that had just caused more problems, in the end. He’d had to trade more favors and cigarettes than he’d like to admit his first few years in order to replace the notebooks that had been stolen or destroyed. He’d felt the same rage then, as well. It was a slow lesson he’d learned, but he’d learned it nonetheless.

Weakness was exploited in prison. A wrong glance, a gasp at the wrong moment...all of it meant that he was vulnerable. He’d had to quell his instincts. Even before prison, he’d been a stoic boy; the rules and politics of his inmates were only an extension of that. Eventually, he’d traded for enough elastic to make a hasty belt to keep his feelings safe. It hadn’t been perfect, no, but at least then he could pull some weight without having anyone find out that he still had emotions. Now that he was back on the outside, it was a hard lesson to forget.

“Thank you,” he nodded to Edgeworth, finally turning away from the door where they had towed the perp a few moments prior. He did his best to ignore how the guards standing at attention visibly relaxed. The Chief Prosecutor stood with one hand stuffed into his pocket, the other hanging slack at his side. His courtroom wear was pristine as always, and Simon felt a wave of self-consciousness; he’d asked the man for a few tips, and he hoped they were noticeable. As if reading his mind, he nodded to Simon’s coat. “Starch. A nice touch.”

Foolishly, Simon’s pride swelled. He was careful to keep a bored expression, but his cheeks traitorously flushed. “Thank you,” he repeated. Edgeworth didn’t need to know that Simon hadn’t washed the suit in weeks. As long as it looked nice. “I’ll have my report to you tonight.”

An eyebrow rose on the man’s forehead. “Tonight? You know those have a two-day window.”

“I know,” Simon said, uncrossing his arms and stuffing them deep into his pockets. He took a step forward, removed the feather from his mouth, and then turned over his shoulder back at Edgeworth. “You’ll have it tonight.”

At that, Edgeworth opened his mouth to protest, but the man was already walking away. He bit his lips together, trying not to notice the same stain he’d noticed on Blackquill’s coat a month prior. In a way, he knew Simon was avoiding him on purpose, the same way Klavier had before he’d asked for a leave of absence. Edgeworth had felt the same way, once in his life. He remembered trying to keep his head held high even when he’d walked past the courtroom employees, especially when their
conversations would pointedly end right as he walked by, as they did for Simon. The man was resilient, that was for sure, but Edgeworth felt a tiredness at the back of his head. The Chief Prosecutor in his time hadn’t been there for Edgeworth when he’d needed it, and he had made a solemn promise when he’d accepted the position that would change; that, however, meant he was staying later and later to try and enforce the idea to Blackquill. He didn’t want to admit that his home life was taking a toll, but if he’d had a dollar every time he’d come home to already find Trucy fast asleep, he could pay for Simon’s dry cleaning three times over. His heart tightened for the man, and he crossed his arms over his chest.

He didn’t want to think of what would happen if Simon ended up too much like him. He’d nearly dodged a bullet with Gavin, but Blackquill…

He could only hope that Klavier’s plans for the man would be enough, whatever they were. Perhaps, at the end of the day, Blackquill didn’t need a Chief as a friend. Perhaps the one thing Simon was constantly missing was just a friend.

As Edgeworth reluctantly started back to his car, he hoped Gavin would take a long enough break from being…well, himself to try and understand the man.

The Prosecutor’s Office was quiet after hours. Like clockwork every day, the hour hand would reach 5, and people would file from their desks, to their cars, and back to their homes to finish out the day however they saw fit. For the past two years of his freedom, Simon Blackquill had idly waved his coworkers aside as they passed, sometimes making a jab at his work ethic, but mostly just shuffling themselves away. Simon was okay with that. He could manage a hand wave at those who wanted to try and make conversation with him. If he were being honest, he rather enjoyed it, though he hardly had the energy to hold a conversation most days. So, he typed away at his computer, some days idling on his Reddit feed, and other days, like the present, he would read and reread the same report until the words melded together. Leaning back in his seat, he pressed the heels of his hands into his eyes, trying to coax the tear ducts into producing moisture once again.

The office, as far as he knew, was empty. His phone sat next to his laptop, a glaring reminder that he wouldn’t be finished until he made another phone call. He’d promised himself that he would text Gavin that night and demand the notebook paper back.

He’d made the same promise every night since Gavin had confronted him.

The part that ate away at Simon wasn’t the fact that Gavin had stolen the book, though he still had to fight back a wave of ire every time he thought about it. No, what really tore at his insides was the fact that he hadn’t climbed into his car and taken off after the dandy. He hated to admit it, but a part of him felt good that someone had read it. He’d spent so much time in his notebook, so much effort into the lines he’d drafted inside…

Klavier’s words had struck him, and not just the ones he’d taken from Simon’s poetry. It was superficial, and he felt foolish for believing so, but someone had read his work. And that someone had liked it. An enraged sense of pride overwhelmed him, and he rested his hands back on the table. Logically, he should have been fully frustrated at Gavin. And he was…but he also knew the feeling of pride would outlast his anger. For all the stories that circulated through the courts, everyone seemed to forget that he didn’t stay angry long. Sure, he was harsh and petty, and spent a lot of his time poking fun at his friends, but below all that…
He shook his head. A part of him wished that he could prove all the stories about him false, but at the end of the day, he knew it was better off that way. The fewer people that tried to get close to him, the better. He had Athena and Aura, and Bucky. His friends before the Phantom…well…

He hadn’t heard from most. And those who he had reached out to were few and far between. Either they had moved away in his seven-year absence, or their lives were too riddled with obstacles to come visit. At least that was their excuse.

Simon gnawed at the inside of his lip, trying to convince himself that the thought didn’t bother him, but it was hard when he had to question if they even believed he was innocent. He shook his head, repeating the same mantra to himself over again:

If he didn’t have friends, he had colleagues; if he didn’t have colleagues, he at least had his work.

His work, which stared back at him, waiting to be edited for the tenth time that evening. He’d found a grammatical error the last read through; he could do better.

Next to his computer sat a stack of papers, every few lashed together with a hasty staple in the upper lefthand corner. Once Simon could make it through his report without finding an error, he would proofread those for the new recruits from Themis. It was a side job he’d taken in his free time, helping the new kids Edgeworth managed to hire right out of high school. Despite himself, Simon had actually taken a liking to a few of the kids. They certainly helped the time pass by faster in the office, however…

It was a feeling Simon couldn’t shake, no matter how long he stared at his computer. Sure, the kids knew things about him. Anyone interested in law over the age of fifteen knew at least the basics; that was something he’d have to accept for the rest of his life.

What ate at him, however, was the notion that they only knew pieces of him. They knew that he was Asian, and that apparently made him the expert on any dishes they wanted to pass off as ‘legit’, but they didn’t know that he’d hated his descent until midway through high school. They knew his hawk was registered as a therapy animal, but they didn’t know that he had to carry the license on him at all times. They knew he had a short fuse, but they didn’t know that the reason he changed the channel during Hallmark movie commercials was because he didn’t want too much of the movie to be spoiled.

A part of him was grateful for that. The less the kids knew about him, the better. He nodded to himself and hit ‘send’ on his report before he could read another damnable word. He kicked away from the computer and rolled over to his second desk, absently grabbing one of his pens and dragging over the first report of the stack. Idly clicking the nib in and out, Simon stared at the wall in front of him, trying to move from one task to the other in his head. It helped to compartmentalize. He kept his work in one piece of his mind, the kids’ work in another, and his trauma in yet another.

What he couldn’t keep locked away, however, was the nagging feeling that Klavier Gavin was up to something. Why else had he stolen his work? What irked Simon more, Gavin had moved from one room of his life into another without being asked. His lips pursed into a tight line. He’d done everything possible to keep his life separate from work. So far as he’d supposed, he’d done everything right, as well. Now…

Shaking his head, Simon dropped the pen and turned back to his phone, still sitting next to his computer. The phone unlocked at his thumbprint and he stared at the messaging app, still open to Gavin’s contact.

The last message between them had been Gavin providing his address. Cowardly though it was,
Simon hadn’t even brought himself to be able to send a single word to him.

*A single word, eh?* He thought, selecting the middle finger emoji and leaving it in the draft. A suitable ice breaker for what the fop had done.

Before he could hit ‘send’, the computer behind him beeped, notifying him of a new message. Startled, Simon turned back to see that Edgeworth had replied. It was a simple email, the words ‘Are you still here?’ in the subject line with nothing else in the body of the message. Simon reached over to tack an all-lowercase ‘yes’ to the end of the subject. He sent the message.

Sufficiently distracted, Simon dropped his phone and turned back to the reports, feeling much like a middle school teacher. He knocked his forehead with the butt of the pen, clicking the nib back out.

He’d read two lines of report when the PA system linked throughout the office buzzed to life. Startled, Simon stood. His knee knocked into the desk above him, and he grunted in pain. He cursed to himself as he heard four ‘clicks’ over the system.

*A bomb?* Simon felt the color drain from his face. Who else was in the building? Given the phrasing of Edgeworth’s email, he was still there, was anyone else? He could run to Edgeworth’s office in less than a minute…

Sounds of a distorted electric guitar flooded through his office, and Simon’s dread turned into utter confusion. He straightened, eyes turning to the speaker embedded in the ceiling. Frowning, he watched it for a moment. The rhythm picked up, and the clicking in the background was soon covered up by a muffled backup section made of drums, bass, and another guitar. His heart thumped in his chest. He felt like a cat, ready to pounce into action once he figured out what was going on. If it were friendly, he would go to see what was going on.

If it weren’t…

His hand absently reached for the katana leaning against his filing cabinet.

A voice, soft yet clear as day, broke the lead guitar’s cadence, and Klavier Gavin’s voice filled the room. Simon felt his face turn red as he listened, but grabbed the katana for real. At first, his mind only recognized the melody, but he forced himself to listen to the words.

The familiar words.

The words he’d written in his notebook.

That bastard.

Nostrils flared, Simon whirled away from the desk, sending his chair flying across the room. In two strides he was in the hallway, where the music continued to follow him. The more Gavin sang, the hotter Simon’s anger flared; did the fop not know when to stop?

The music turned into some sort of chorus, though it was hard to tell. The guitar and Gavin’s voice were the only things that hadn’t been pre-recorded. Subconsciously, Simon’s boots fell in rhythm to the guitar. He rounded the corner at the end of the hall as if to take the stairs down to the first floor…

…and almost ran straight into Miles Edgeworth.

The other man had stopped a moment before the corner. He must have heard Simon’s footsteps. Simon, in his hurry to the stairwell, and a possible relief from the noise, hadn’t even thought that Edgeworth might have been on his way to *him*. The rage boiling inside Simon subsided for a
moment before Klavier began singing again. He turned his attention back to the ceiling, as if he were going to rip the speakers out of the walls themselves.

“Blackquill,” Edgeworth repeated himself, standing tall. Sure, he wasn’t as tall as Simon, and he had to look down to make eye contact, but in that moment, Simon felt like a child. He also found that he didn’t care. “I was just on my way to tell you to go home…” Edgeworth eyed the sword in his hand. “A present for Gavin?”

“Special delivery for fops who don’t know when to quit,” he snarled, moving to breeze by Edgeworth and continue on his way. Edgeworth, too quick for him, raised a hand and ducked his head to the side. Simon grit his teeth together as he ran into Edgeworth’s hand, forcing himself to grip the katana with both hands to keep from snapping. After a moment, Edgeworth looked back up.

“Do you want to tell me what this is really about, Blackquill?”

Gavin’s song swung back into a chorus, and Simon took a step back, forcing the panic and anger back down. Apathetic, he thought. I can turn off the need to care.

“I don’t know what you’re talking about.”

Edgeworth fixed him with a glare. Even behind the glasses, which he took off in court, the stare pierced into Simon’s gut. It was a glare Simon knew Edgeworth had been working on for years, but it still cut daggers into him. He relented.

“An argument between Gavin and I. Nothing too dramatic, I just need to put an end to it.”

The stare held for another moment before Edgeworth relaxed, shifting his weight to one leg. Simon knew that look; Edgeworth was trying to piece everything together.

“Excuse me, sir, but I need to—,” Simon pushed past him, trying to ignore the panic at the thought that Edgeworth might catch on, and set one hand on the stairwell door.

“Gavin used some of your poems to write this, didn’t he?” Edgeworth asked over his shoulder, and Simon froze in place. How did he do that? Caught, Simon slowly turned back away from the door. “Oh, don’t give me that. It wasn’t hard to figure out,” he continued, turning himself to face the younger man. He moved his coat aside to push one hand into his pocket. “Ever since Gavin asked for his leave of absence, he’s been tailing you around. I assume he heard you singing after hours, and…well, you know Klavier Gavin. He can’t let anything go once he’s made up his mind.”

Not for the first time that night, Simon felt his face grow hot. “You…?”

“The vents,” Edgeworth provided, and Simon gnashed his teeth together. “Plus, your office is close to the break room, and sometimes Detective Skye brings those donuts from down the street by.”

Simon nodded, unsure what to say about the donuts, but he turned back to Edgeworth with a resolute stare. “I’ll get Gavin to shut this off. I—,”

“While I don’t care for the delivery,” Edgeworth continued as if he hadn’t heard Simon, “the words are masterfully crafted.” He shot Simon with another glance. “You’re sure you don’t want to take credit for this?”

Shock, mixed with pride, flooded Simon. “I…”

“Gavin must be forming another band,” Edgeworth mused, crossing his arms over his chest. His forefinger absently tapped against his upper arm, as if it were helping him think. “He asked you to
Simon could only stare at the older man, baffled. He’d always read about Edgeworth’s deductive skills, or seen it happen to others but to have it worked on himself?

Preposterous.

Edgeworth stared at the other man for a moment before he softened, his hard exterior shell almost melting away. What was it Wright had always joked about? All his prosecutors needed to have some sort of tragic backstory?

Well, not all of them, Wright, he thought. Just…these two. If I can help these two…

“Blackquill,” he began softly. “Why are you here every night?”

“Why are you here every night?” He countered. “Something unsatisfactory at home?”

Edgeworth fixed him with a flat look. “I’m here every night because I know there’s an issue with one of my best prosecutors, and I’ve been hoping he’d come to me before I had to go to him to see what was wrong.” Simon bit his lips together. “But since that doesn’t look like it’s going to happen, I can no longer ignore it.

Simon,” he fixed him with a look, and Blackquill balked. He had never heard Edgeworth call him that. Athena, Wright, and Skye, possibly, but never Edgeworth. “Are you all right?”

“I—,” Simon felt himself stirring up the same old lie, but he squashed it back down and turned his face away. Fool, he thought to himself, if you won’t let Athena know what’s going on, why on earth are you even thinking of letting this man in?

Klavier had finished whatever song he had written by now, but had continued playing his guitar over the demo track.

Edgeworth held up his hand. “You don’t have to answer that. Your song told me all I need to know.”

“It’s not—,” Simon started, but the look he received from Edgeworth shut him right up. “Fine. I wrote the words,” he admitted. “But the rest of it wasn’t my idea.”

“That’s fine,” Edgeworth waved it off. “Gavin mentioned something about a rock band before he left.”

“Ah,” Simon nodded. They stood in silence for a moment before Edgeworth finally uncrossed his arms, turning from a vaguely hostile position to an open one.

“I think you should take him up on his offer,” he said honestly, and Simon whirled back to him, his mouth open as if to object. “Not because I think you should run away from your issues, Blackquill, but because I believe that you need a break.”

“I’m fine,” Simon rattled off without thinking.

“You most certainly are not fine,” Edgeworth snapped. “You’ve been staying late almost every night for the past year. I know this because Wright will not let me forget about it.”

“I didn’t ask you to stay after hours until I left,” Simon snapped almost petulantly. “That was all your idea.”

“Perhaps,” Edgeworth conceded. “But I also know what it feels like to want to just bury yourself in your work so you don’t have to face the demons that are waiting in your own thoughts.” Simon felt
his heart thumping in his chest. They were edging on something *different* than just...normal conversation. Edgeworth continued, “I know what it’s like to feel so lost that you only know how to work, Blackquill. To feel like this is the only thing you’re relatively good at, so you continue to do it even though...even though it’s slowly killing you inside.”

It wasn’t completely accurate, but Simon stayed quiet. It was close enough to how he felt.


*A man not unlike yourself,* he thought. Damn, he’d have to stop bringing in strays at one point.

He figured that would happen as soon as Wright stopped bringing them in, too.

“I’m not saying *run away,*” he sighed, rubbing his forehead. “I’m saying that you should take some time off. Remember what it’s like to be a young man.”

“I’m not that young,” Simon felt his stubbornness creeping up on him, and Edgeworth deadpanned at him.

“Then remember what it’s like to be a *free man,*” Edgeworth said, as if he hadn’t wanted to use the direct verbiage. Simon felt like he’d been punched in the gut. “Get away from the courts for a little while. Remember that you have a *life* outside of this.” He took a deep sigh, and stepped closer. “Have I ever told you about the months after von Karma’s arrest?”

Simon’s head snapped back up, and he stared at Edgeworth with incredulous eyes. Now *this* was unexpected.

Edgeworth took another deep breath. It was years ago that it had happened, but he still felt the shame that came with it. Sure, it had subsided over the years with therapeutic help, but he figured it would always be there in one shape or another. Usually, he let Wright tell the story, but for the second time in a week, Edgeworth fought off a sinking feeling that he couldn’t let Blackquill make the same mistake as him.

“I hated being alone,” Edgeworth started. “When I was alone, that’s when I started to remember everything von Karma used to say to me. I could hear his voice in my head; more than a faint memory, it was like he was there.” Edgeworth pursed his lips together. “I stayed late at work all the time; if I buried myself deep enough into my cases, I’d stop hearing him. And, after a month, I figured I had undone what years of trauma and abuse had started. It wasn’t until the SL-9 case reared its ugly head, and I had to face the Miles Edgeworth that existed under von Karma. Reworking that case, I realized there were two things I had yet to face.

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“First, I had hardly made a dent in what had been pounded into my head for so long. All the work, the lack of sleep...I had to realize that paperwork would not cover up what had happened to me.” Simon watched the man in front of him with a controlled expression, eyebrows quirked up. This was a side of Miles Edgeworth he figured—no, he knew—that few had ever seen. Just looking at the man, he would have figured that Edgeworth had bounced back after the DL-6 case with grace. “Second, I had to face the Miles Edgeworth others thought I was. I had to face the man that forged evidence without so much as a blink of an eye; who people would whisper about when he walked by.” He smirked to himself. “I remember walking past a group of chatty guards only to have them stop and stare until I passed, and then I could only hear their whispers.”

Simon’s ears turned red. Had he not suffered the same treatment over and over again? Had he not berated himself for being the only prosecutor in the office that gained that sort of treatment?
“After SL-9,” he began, and Simon looked up from his musings. “I thought my same coping habits would work. I thought I could just delve back into the paperwork. That staying late and burying my feelings away would make it all heal…eventually.”

“Then you left that note,” Simon continued for him. He’d heard the story from Athena, who had, no doubt, heard it from Wright. Edgeworth let out a soft, single laugh.

“‘That note,’” he smiled, though it was a sad smile, “will haunt me until the day I actually die.”

Simon blinked at him.

“Partly because Wright will never let me forget it,” he sighed, “and partly because it was the most foolish thing I have ever done in my life. I needed the break, yes,” he conceded, “but I did not need to hurt those around me like that. Those who cared for me.” It was still shocking to believe that Wright had actually cared for him in that sense back then, but that could wait. He turned to face Simon, who had visibly softened, as well. “I don’t want you to make the same mistakes I did, Blackquill. You deserve a break after everything you’ve gone through, and you deserve to take one in peace.”

“So, what?” Simon scoffed. “I take a leave of absence? With Gavin?”

“Perhaps,” Edgeworth nodded. “Or you take one on your own. I know a quiet place in Germany that would be a good place to recharge.” Blackquill rolled his eyes. “I do know, however,” Edgeworth pressed on, “that recovering with someone, even if your experiences are not the same, helps more than suffering on your own. Perhaps Gavin would be a good fit. You’re obviously talented, and I have a feeling that expressing yourself is something that would be easier for you if you were singing on a stage instead of talking one-on-one with a therapist.”

“What, so then everyone could hear what I’m going through?”

“Not necessarily,” Edgeworth shook his head. “People will always speculate. But this wouldn’t be about people, Simon. This is about you, and how you want to spend your time recovering.”

Simon stared at him, still listening to Gavin soloing over the intercom.

“You don’t have to have the answers right now,” Edgeworth offered. “But think about what I said. Don’t be the same fool I was, Blackquill.”

Simon opened his mouth as if to reply, but when the words tried coming out, he found that they were stuck inside his throat.

“I want you to join me because you’d be great!” Gavin’s words rung in his head. The man still hadn’t given up. What did he have, a camera on Simon’s car so he knew when he left? After all the times Simon had turned him down, Gavin was still there, trying to get something out of him. Not even that, he was trying to do exactly what Edgeworth had said; he was trying to recover with someone instead of on his own.

“Thank you, Edgeworth-dono,” he nodded. “I…I need to weigh my options.”

“As is your right,” Edgeworth waved. “I’ll be leaving shortly; please, Blackquill, try not to stay the entire night.”

Simon nodded again, and turned on his heel. He pressed the handle into the stairwell and entered. It was only six floors to the bottom level, and the movement helped him clear his mind.
Gavin had tried this many times to recruit Simon. Not that Simon wanted to particularly encourage persistence when he was being bothered, but he’d not given up yet. A man like that would hardly give up on getting well, either. And if he had someone with him…

Simon could take Edgeworth up on his offer to get out of the city and recover on his own, but he wouldn’t know the language. Not only that, but it would mean even more time to himself. Time to him didn’t want, nor feel necessarily comfortable taking on. No, escaping to Germany, to a supposed empty ex-von Karma mansion wasn’t the answer for him. As his legs turned down the stairs, katana still held tightly in hand, he faced something he hadn’t wanted to yet.

Gavin had seen what was in his notebook. Although he’d have to have a serious talk about boundaries, he’d read what was inside, and he hadn’t shied away. He’d seen Simon’s vulnerability, and he’d defended it as something good. Not just that, but he’d called it amazing. If there was anyone Simon could learn to be vulnerable around, it was a man like that. He’d even empathized with it, on a certain level.

Not only that, but Gavin had done the rockstar life before, and from what Simon remembered, he’d been good at keeping his normal life and the rockstar life separate. Perhaps, if it worked out, he’d be able to keep Simon out of the spotlight.

He reached the first floor and pushed back out into the main hall. The receptionist’s desk was empty, and Gavin had broken into the security office. Well, broken or snuck, Simon wasn’t sure, but he knew that Gavin wouldn’t have been allowed in on a normal day. He pushed his way into the room, and his eyes landed on a closet at the back of the room. The door was propped open with a wastebasket, and the sound of someone humming accompanied the same music from before. This time, it was in person, not over a crackly intercom. Simon stepped forward, using his katana to push the door open.

Inside, Klavier’s humming stopped, and his fingers froze. He held the single note over the track. He sat, beanie on his head, loose tank top sporting some sort of German phrase, and booted feet propped up on a small desk. On that same desk sat a small speaker, an amplifier connected to the jet black guitar in his lap, and the intercom’s microphone that pointed at him. He looked ridiculous, hiding in a tiny closet surrounded by fiber optic cables and blinking lights. His eyes moved from the katana in Simon’s hand, to him, and back again a few more times. He opened his mouth as if to speak, the reverb on the guitar fading out. The music continued from the speaker.

“All right,” Simon cut him off before he could speak. “I will give you one chance to prove to me this will work.” Gavin sat up straighter, removing his feet from the desk. Simon held up his hand. He wasn’t finished. “You will, however, respect any boundaries I set up, and you will understand that any trust I have built up, once it is gone, is not easily won back.” Klavier pursed his lips together, obviously trying to hide a smile.

“So…you’re in?” Gavin asked. Try as he might, he couldn’t help the hopeful tone that snuck into his voice. Simon sighed.

“I’m in.”

“Ja!” Gavin cheered, strumming the guitar in a final, triumphant chord. “Rock and roll, Herr Samurai!”

Chapter End Notes
How to ask someone into your band: A musical by Klavier Gavin.

tumblr
playlist
aesthetic
Absolute Zero

Chapter Summary

Oh, I'm not afraid
I'm giving in to grievances again
You're looking at an absolute zero;
I'm not the devil, but I won't be your hero

Chapter Notes

Well, this came out sooner than anyone ever expected! It's amazing what happens when I have six hours of uninterrupted time to just...do whatever. I'm as pleasantly surprised as anyone.
This is as good a time as any to explain the links I've got at the bottom of the chapters:
Tumblr: Where I tumble. Not as much as I used to, but still every once and a while.
Playlist: The set list for the band.
Aesthetic: Other songs that exist in the metal au.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Klavier woke three mornings later to the faint sound of his alarm buzzing on his night stand. It was a gentle alarm, though soon it would crescendo into violent buzzes and beeps. For the moment, however, it was calm. Klavier decided he would try, as well. He shut his eyes again, burrowing himself into his bed. His…bed? It felt strange. He had a blanket over him, and he comfortably laid on his back, yes, but his bed wasn’t so close to a wall. His left arm should have been able to lay flat next to him.

His eyes snapped open, and instead of staring at the light above his bed, he stared at the blank ceiling in his living room.

Jarred, he jolted onto his right side again, away from the back of the sofa. The plush cushions cradled him stiffer than his bed would have, he realized now, but it was a faint realization now that he stared at his living room.

Which, admittedly, was a mess. Remnants of microwaved dinners and empty bottles haphazardly lay strewn across every surface. The bowl he’d used to hold his popcorn the night before held his phone, which still vibrated to a steady beat. Frowning, he reached over and grabbed the phone, squinting against the late morning sun.

Well, hardly morning sun, he realized. The clock on his phone read 11:30 in the morning, and he let his head fall back against one of his throw blankets, which he’d—apparently—substituted for a pillow in a stroke of ‘good’ judgment.

With a groan, he buried his face in the plush fleece and let out a long sigh. He’d be stiff later.

Sober Klavier was going to have to have a serious conversation with drunk Klavier, he decided.
There was a time in his life where he’d been able to party all night and then sleep on a couch, but that version of himself had been much younger, with skin that would revitalize itself. Now, when he looked back at his blank screen, he only saw a haggard man staring back at him, wondering if it was still a party if it was only him and Captain Morgan.

His frown deepened, and he let his head fall back down. He’d hoped, somewhere inside of him, that Simon’s agreement would bring some sort of change to how he looked. Or acted. That something would finally click into place. It had been a foolish hope. Even now, looking around, he could only remember how part of the living room had gotten so messy. Maybe he’d tried to clean last night…

Right, he thought, finally remembering why he’d started in the first place. He’d wanted to try cleaning the apartment—the reason why was still fuzzy—but his motivation after a day throwing together scratch track after scratch track was wearing thin. He’d already chiseled his way through a flask that day, and as he went to go for another tip to try and find motivation there, he’d found it empty. He remembered feeling suddenly panicked, and without thinking, had returned to his stash to refill.

After that…well…motivation had come in abundance, however, his motor skills had already left him. Eventually, he’d given up and opted instead for watching old children’s cartoons and eating popcorn for dinner.

Now that he had it all figured out in his head, he relaxed, and his eyes closed tighter. the only piece that was missing was why he’d needed to clean.

Oh well. If I can’t remember it, was it really important?

Peace swept over him, and he let himself embrace the couch as a good substitute for his bed. Perhaps a leave of absence wasn’t terrible, after all. If he could drift back to sleep, perhaps he’d be using his leave of absence correctly…

Herr Samurai is coming today, he heard something in the back of his mind remind him.

“That’s nice,” he murmured.

A moment.

His eyes shot open.

“Herr Samurai is coming today,” he repeated out loud.

In an instant, Klavier was off the couch, stopping only for a moment to hold his head, and then he was a blur. He rounded the living room in a flurry, grabbing the recyclable bottles and papers first before dumping them into his recycling bin. He could sort it later. Garbage followed next, then dishes and clothes. By the time he tossed the clothes lying around his living room into his bedroom, he turned to the clock. 12:15. Blackquill would be along in forty-five minutes.

Klavier groaned, looking around his apartment. If he ignored the recycling bin staring at him, he felt much less embarrassed to let someone in.

His shower ate half an hour, despite having 75% less hair to worry about, and he was halfway through pulling on a tank top when he was hit with a wave of the exhausting need to stop moving. It hit him like a ton of bricks, like it always did. What was it he’d read about…? Executive dysfunction? He grit his teeth, digging the heels of his hands into his temples, which throbbed with every beat of his heart. He stood like that for longer than he’d wanted to admit, trying to ground himself. He forced his feet flatter onto the ground, trying to remind himself that if he weren’t real, he
wouldn’t have been able to feel the carpet beneath his toes. When he opened his eyes again, only a fraction of the need to hurry remained.

“What was I doing?” He asked no one in particular, setting his hands on the counter in front of him and staring into his kitchen. *Something* had brought on the wave, but—

The recycling bin. He stared at it. That was a lot of glass, right? When was the last time he’d taken it out?

He turned back to the clock, which now bordered dangerously close to 1:00, the agreed upon meeting time. With a sigh, he turned back to the recycling. At what point did the glass become too much…?

Despite himself, Klavier grit his teeth and grabbed the bin. He hurried downstairs, puckering his lips in a silent ‘shhhh’ at the clinking glass as he neared the community recycling. He upended the contents and then turned back to his apartment. The back of his head buzzed with the unmet need to have something—anything—to get him through the day. He’d woken up hours later than he’d wanted, and in his rush to get his apartment looking presentable, he hadn’t had the time—nor the urge—until that moment. *Maybe something small before I go into entertaining mode…*

He rounded the corner only to see that there was a dark figure standing in front of his door, arm raised as if to knock.

“Herr Samurai!” Klavier exclaimed, and Simon Blackquill turned his head to him. In that moment, Klavier was eternally grateful that he’d changed out of yesterday’s clothes. Instead of the grimy pajamas he’d donned for the entire day, he wore a pair of loose shorts and a tank top. Simon had… almost dressed for the weather. Black jeans and a black hoodie kind of counted, right? His hair was still pulled back into a bushy ponytail, one that Klavier would have sworn only got more frazzled the longer he knew the man.

“Gavin-dono,” he nodded in return, and Klavier had to restrain himself from wincing. Not at the suffix, but at the name. Damn, he hated it more than he remembered. “I didn’t hear music from your rooms, so I was hoping you were still here.”

“I was…” Klavier started, cutting himself off before he could finish with *getting rid of some embarrassing recycling.* “…Taking out the trash.” He moved past Simon and unlocked his door for them both.

“So I see.”

Klavier felt his cheeks flush. He couldn’t help the peevish feeling that coursed through him. He’d been so convinced that he needed a drink in that moment that he hadn’t even thought about what he would do if Blackquill actually showed up on time.

The man was nothing if not punctual. Klavier frowned to himself. *It’s not like it’s an issue,* he thought to himself. *You can make it through a day without a drink.*

“Come in, come in,” he tried distracting himself. If he could get beyond the initial cravings, maybe he could make it through the next few hours. “Can I get you anything? Coffee? Water?”

“Coffee,” Simon nodded. Klavier turned to his kitchen, suddenly extremely aware that he didn’t know what to do with Simon now. Sure, he’d had a general idea, but he’d been banking on having a few hours to get everything ready for him.

“You know,” he called over his shoulder. “Generally, musicians are classically *late.*”
“A samurai isn’t,” Simon countered nonchalantly, still in the entryway. He was most likely taking in Klavier’s apartment. What did he think? There was little Klavier wouldn’t do to step inside his mind in that moment.

“Well, a samurai is going to have to get used to waiting, then, if this is going to work.”

“Emphasis on ‘if’,” Simon finally turned to Klavier. “I still maintain my one-strike’ policy.”

Klavier grimaced before he turned around. “Fine, then. Explain to me what counts as a strike.”

“Any breach of trust,” Simon said without hesitation. “Reading my private notes counts as a breach of trust, Gavin.”

No -dono this time, Klavier make sure to keep his expression neutral. That must mean he’s more than a little serious.

Klavier raised his hands. “I promise I will not do something so rash again. I merely wanted to prove a point.”

“Point proven. Just don’t do it again.”

“Understood.”

“And, I’ve agreed to do this your way, Gavin, but I won’t compromise my integrity. If any of this starts to feel off, I’m out. Just because you made a point doesn’t mean I’m 100% convinced I should be doing this.”

“So, what do you want me to do? I know you’re going to be amazing.”

“Prove it to me,” Simon said without hesitation. When Klavier quirked an eyebrow at him, Simon threw his arms in the air. It wasn’t an exasperated gesture this time, just a tired one. “All this is new to me. I need proof that this is going to work.”

Klavier’s coffee machine let out three small beeps. The pot had brewed quickly, thank goodness. He took a moment to grab Blackquill and himself a mug.

“Then proof you shall have,” he said. “I hope you didn’t want creamer, I’m fresh out. And dairy makes your voice go flat.”

“Black coffee is fine.”

“Das perfekt,” Klavier flashed him a smile as he handed him the mug. “There’s a glass of water with your name on it that you have to drink when you finish that. Can’t have you damaging that gift of yours.”

Simon rolled his eyes. “Gavin—,”

“Achtung, Herr Samurai,” Klavier waved him off. “Call me Klavier. Or Klav. Anything but Gavin.” He moved into the studio. Gavin was Kristoph, and he’d already decided he was not going to turn into his brother today. Whether or not he had to do that out of sheer willpower, or if it was true he still wasn’t certain. “Now please, shall we step into the studio?”

Lips pursed into a tight line, Simon obliged. “Seems a bit informal.”

“I’m a bit informal, in case you haven’t noticed,” he nonchalantly tossed over his shoulder. He set his mug down on the desk and reached for the unscented lotion there. He let Simon take in the
studio for the second time as he applied the lotion to his new tattoo. The black and white phoenix had turned out better than he’d ever imagined, but he’d forgotten how itchy new tattoos were. As he rubbed the lotion into his skin, he watched Simon with interest. He was like a timid dog. Instead of smelling everything, however, he had to take it all in with his own two eyes before he could really start to relax. Let him be, Klavier thought to himself. The man’s had a rough time of it. The least I can do is let him feel comfortable around here.

Finally, Simon’s eyes landed on him. He nodded to Klavier’s arm. “New?”

“About a week and a half old,” Klavier answered. “Now, how do you want to go about this?”

Simon shrugged. “You’re the one who’s done a rehearsal before.”

Fair enough.

“Did you listen to what I sent you?”

“You mean what you did at the office?” Simon finally draped his bag over the same seat he had before. “Yes, I did.”

“Well, we can learn that…”

“It sounded good with your vocals,” Simon cut him off, taking a long gulp of his coffee. He leveled him with an even stare. “You should sing it.”

Klavier gawked for a moment before he waved his hands in front of himself. “Nein, nein, nein. I’m not here to sing, Herr Samurai. That’s your job.”

Simon crossed his arms over his chest. “So you want me to write the songs and sing them?”

“Well…yes,” Klavier said, as if it were obvious. Simon snorted.

“I’ll sing the ones I feel comfortable singing,” he measured Klavier with a stubborn expression. “But I’m not…” he sighed. “I don’t always write what I want others to hear, no matter how ‘good’ you think it is.” Klavier opened his mouth as if to reply, but Simon was already moving on. “It’s…hard to explain.”

“Not really,” Klavier shook his head. “I think you’re just afraid that, should you sing some of what your’e actually feeling, people will catch on to how you feel. And, since you’re not comfortable with your own feelings, you don’t want to help anyone figure anything out. You’d rather write it, and then have someone else present it, so that they don’t catch on that it’s your feelings.”

Simon stared at him for a moment. Had he a little less self control, Klavier was certain that he’d have been staring with mouth wide open. Klavier held eye contact as he took a sip of his coffee.

“How’d I do?”

“Damn dandy,” Simon muttered as he turned away. Klavier grinned into his drink. Nail on the head, he thought to himself. “All right, fine,” Simon waved one hand in the air. “What about it?”

Klavier finished the drink and set the mug down. “I’m assuming this is non-negotiable, given your tone.”

Simon set his mug next to Klavier’s. “You’re catching on quickly.”

It was Klavier’s turn to cross his arms over his chest, mulling it over. He’d hoped he wouldn’t have
had to sing again, but that look in Simon’s eyes…

“Besides,” Simon continued. “I…I think the best bands have two distinct voices.”

Distinct was the best way Klavier could describe his voice and Simon’s, that was for sure.

“You’re saying that you’d rather I sing the songs you write?” Simon nodded.

“Don’t try and tell me you don’t have any songs you’ve been holding on to these past few years,” Simon leaned on the back of the chair. “I’d be willing to bet you’ve got more than I do.” Klavier nodded in agreement, though he pressed his tongue into the back of his teeth. “Besides, you changed some of my words around. Made them sound…better. I’m not saying I won’t help you, but…I’m also way out of my element. It…would be best if I didn’t have to stand in a spotlight alone.”

Klavier sighed. “You have a fair point. I’ll think about it. And we’ll talk it over with Dee when she gets here.”

“Dee?”

“My—our manager.”

“Ah.”

“In the meantime,” Klavier snapped his hands next to his head. “I need to know what your range is. I only heard you that one night, and it doesn’t really give me a chance to know what you can do.” He gestured toward the keyboard. “Which is important, as you can imagine.” If the man’s a talented singer, lyricist, and composer, I’m doomed, Klavier thought. Not because it’s a bad thing, but because I’ll probably actually swoon in real life.

“I suppose,” Simon said, thought he frowned at the keyboard. “I’m not great with melody writing.”

“Yet,” Klavier corrected, taking a seat at the full keyboard. “You aren’t great with melody writing yet.”

Simon rolled his eyes, and Klavier turned over his shoulder.

“Well?”

“Well what?”

Klavier looked pointedly at the space on the bench next to him.

“You want me to sit?”

“No, I want you to stand behind me like I’m you’re der dreckskerl of a choir teacher. Of course I want you to sit next to me.”

Simon fixed him with a look. “Are we children?”

“I am exactly five years old,” Klavier told him matter-of-factly. “And I need someone to sit next to me at the keys so I can understand how they sing.”

Begrudgingly, Simon sat down. The bench wasn’t large, so their knees bumped each other’s. Klavier smiled and started playing the keys in front of him.

“Sehr gut,” he smiled. “Now, I think you know this one.” He started into one of the songs he’d been
teaching himself over the past week and a half. If was fairly well-known, and he though he’d heard Simon singing it to himself that night. Simon blinked down at the keys, effectively missing his cue. Klavier gave an exaggerated nod, looping back to the cue again. This time, he elbowed the man four beats before he was supposed to come in. Taking a deep breath, Simon opened his mouth.

And began to…warble.

Klavier’s eyes opened wide as he stared down at his hands, which dutifully kept playing. Suddenly grateful for the time he’d spent practicing for this moment, he stared down at his hands. His mind moved a million miles a minute.

What had happened in the week and a half between hearing Simon sing for the first time and now? Klavier had been so certain that Simon’s voice was the one, but this…?

This sounded similar, yes, but…it was so shaky, and the tone was…forced. Was Simon Blackquill actually nervous?

After the chorus, Klavier stopped playing. Simon sat next to him quietly, gnawing on his lip. Klavier slowly turned to him.

“Herr Blackquill,” Klavier started nicely. “I mean this in the nicest way possible, but what was that?”

Simon blinked at him. “What do you mean?”

“I mean,” Klavier cleared his throat. “That you sounded much different in the prosecutor’s office. Are you….are you nervous?” He tired his best to keep the giggle out of his question.

Simon must have heard it anyway, because he bristled in an instant. “I’m not nervous!” He insisted.

Klavier smiled. “It’s all right to be,” he assured the man, giving him a pat on the arm. “I guarantee you, though, I’m not going to laugh at you.”

Simon’s face flushed red. “I’m not nervous,” he repeated, though it was more to assuage himself than anything else.

“Do you want to try again?” Klavier asked, sitting up straight. “We can do some warm ups I used to do when I was nervous.” Simon rolled his eyes. “Because I’m sure that happens often.”

“Actually, it does,” Klavier took in a deep breath, using his hands to emphasize the air movement. He let it back out again. “People just don’t notice because they see what they want to see.”

The next time he breathed, he could feel Simon doing the same. He allowed himself a self-satisfied grin.

“People know me as a confident rock star,” He explained. “If he had any chance at getting Blackquill to open up to him, he’d better make the man understand that he had emotions, too. “So they see that before they see how my hands shake when I take the bench.” Another deep breath. “I know you as an intimidating presence,” he continued. “So I didn’t even assume you’d be nervous right now.”

“I’m not—,”

“Singing in front of others is different than singing one-on-one,” Klavier pressed on. “If you haven’t done one, there are bound to be some hiccups starting off.” He quieted Blackquill with another breath. “From your stomach, this time. Stop moving your shoulders. Breathe in through just your
stomach, not your lungs.” Simon complied, though he furrowed his brow as he did so. They sat quietly for a few moments, Simon’s face still red. Klavier’s hands returned to the keys. “Now, let’s try that again.”

This time, Simon came in at the right time, but his tone was still shaky. He swallowed the lump at the back of his throat between bars and tried again. Klavier nodded along patiently, this time leading the man into the second verse. He’d hoped that the exposure would help Simon get used to singing in front of him, but the song ended, and Simon’s voice still shook like an icicle hanging for dear life under a busy bridge. When Klavier ran out of song, he folded his hands back in his lap.

The quiet stretched on for longer than a moment. When Klavier accepted that Simon wasn’t going to break the quiet, he forced his rockstar smile to his face and turned it on the man.

“Better,” he said.


“No, but we have time,” he assured him. “I don’t need you to be a rockstar yet, Herr Samurai. I just need you to know you can do it.”

They continued on like that for a few hours, Klavier slowly teaching Simon how to properly sing and use his full lung capacity, and Simon begrudgingly playing along. When Klavier could no longer ignore the frustration seeping through the man’s terse replies, he clapped his hands together and said that they could move on to something else. Taking Simon’s frustration into account, Klavier turned to lyrics, and led them out into his living room. Simon followed without a word, feeling the red on his ears barely subside. What was wrong with him? Gavin—Klavier—whatever he was supposed to call him—was one of two, maybe three people who knew that he could…well, do what he could. What happened when he couldn’t get over this block? What happened when he clammed up every time he tried to sing?

Fool, he thought to himself. He knew what would happen. He’d go back to Edgeworth, asking to come back to work, looking like a dog with its tail between its legs. A sickening thought, yes, but he’d promised himself that he’d pull on this thread until it was done. Athena had wheedled it out of him, of course, and the thought of telling her he’d backed out…well, it made his insides crawl. He would not back down from this. She’d been trying to get him back out in the world for two years now, and she’d been so happy when he’d told her. He eyed Klavier as he threw a frozen pizza into his oven, kicking the door shut as he turned back, still blathering on about something or another. Simon listened with half an ear. He figured Klavier could take care of the logistics portion of…this. The band? Dared he call it that, in case it would get his hopes up? With his luck, it would fail, just like everything else in his life. No. He’d call it a project until it proved that it wasn’t going to fall out beneath him, and that was that. The late Saturday afternoon sun soaked in around Klavier’s curtains, and Simon stared. A small panic welled up within him. He’d lived among windows like that whenever he’d acted out. Solitary confinement hadn’t necessarily been an awful thing, but those windows…

Absently, his legs carried him over to the window, and he took the cord in his hands. It took him a moment to figure out the mechanism, but as soon as he did, he cranked the window open. Sunlight poured over him, and the hooks that had pulled his shoulders into a tense hitch finally loosed. He let out a long breath, taking in the quiet sunlight.
The quiet.

He turned back to Gavin, who was watching him with quirked eyebrows. He pursed his lips together. Gavin had probably finished asking him a question.

“Sunlight,” he said dumbly, pointing to the window. Klavier, leaning on the counter between the living room and kitchen, nodded slowly.

“Right,” he muttered, eyes squinted against the light. “…You didn’t hear a word I just said, did you?”

Simon shook his head.

“I said Dee would be over soon and we would talk a more general game plan, but in the meantime, are there any other hidden gems you’ve got in there that you’d want to share?”

‘In there’ meaning his notebook, or his head, Simon wasn’t sure. He crossed his arms over his chest. “I suppose I do.”

“Well, how’s this?” Klavier asked, holding out his hands in front of himself, like he were offering a peace treaty to a scared animal. Simon almost smirked at the thought. “There’s a pad of paper on the coffee table. You take that, I’ll go grab my guitar, and we’ll try and string some more of those into a song.” He turned away, stopping only a few steps away. He turned back. “The ones you want to share, I mean.”

Simon’s eyes narrowed as he retreated. Gavin was treading on thin ice. A part of him wanted to poke the bear, just to see what would happen, but he restrained himself. So far, though the day had been a pretty obvious embarrassment, Gavin hadn’t made him feel embarrassed. He’d done that well enough himself, but the man’s sunny optimism was contagious like a rash.

He scowled, grabbing the legal pad. Maybe he’d wait to try to do metaphors a different day.

Gavin returned with his own notebook, tab sheets, and the same black guitar he’d had three days ago. It was a slick instrument, and Simon wondered what it would be like to swing it around like a sword. He could only imagine Gavin’s dismay at a sight like that, and found himself grinning.

Gavin noticed. “Found something good?” He asked, taking a seat on the floor.

Simon shook his head. “Just wondering what the resistance would be on something like that if I tried hitting someone with it.”

Gavin paled, and Simon grinned. “You know, there was a guy in the clink that was in for stealing a real fancy guitar and then killing someone with it—,”

Klavier wildly waved his hands around to get Simon to stop, trying to get him back on task. Simon barked at that, his laugh short and curt as it came out. Klavier stared at him for a moment before he started laughing in earnest. Simon calmed himself before Klavier could, and he examined the man before he could calm down.

Memories flashed in Simon’s head, and he blinked them away as they came, but not before he could make out what his subconscious was trying to dredge back up.

A long hallway. A legal pad, much like the one he held now, tucked under the guard’s arm and pen tucked behind his ear. Shuttered windows lined the halls, fluorescent lights leading them to the
luxuriously isolated cell in the west wing of the prison. Boots clunking along, two guards in front of him, one guard behind. The laugh. Long, curly blonde hair. A mangled smile. A scar that tightened whenever Simon hit a nerve. Darkness behind icy blue eyes.

Simon pushed the thoughts away as Klavier calmed himself.

“On a more serious note, I brought your notebook and mine. I have a few songs already mostly strung together…” He continued on, and Simon watched him for another moment before giving his full attention to his train of thought, one piece of information eating at the back of his mind.

Both Gavin brothers were always all business.

When a knock came at the door, Klavier had five new voice recordings on his phone, each a chord progression or riff, and a melody line preceded by Gavin explaining the day, time, and where to find the song that coincided with the recording. Simon stayed mostly quiet, letting the man work. Like his legal work, before he’d turned into a paper lackey, Klavier kept his music mostly organized, explaining he’d send a few scratch tracks to Simon before they turned into full-fledged songs. Simon had asked when he could expect those.

“Probably tomorrow,” Klavier had admitted. Simon was in the middle of changing his assessment of Klavier’s organization to hyper fixation when they both startled at the disturbance. “Einen Augenblick!” Klavier called, gently setting the guitar down and then rushing to the door. A dim light from his oven caught his eyes as he passed. “Ach, Herr Samurai, die pizza!”

Just at the thought, Simon’s stomach rumbled. Without a word, he rose to his feet and made his way to the kitchen as Klavier opened the door.

“It’s about time!” A woman’s voice snapped as soon as it was open. Simon ripped the oven door open to see a circular piece of char staring at him. The char, he figured, used to be their pizza. His stomach rumbled again, this time upset. They’d been so focused he’d forgotten about his hunger.

“Frau Richter!” Klavier greeted her, pointedly ignoring her annoyance. “How good to see you!”

“Do you know how long I’ve been trying to call you?” She watched as a satisfying—to her, at least—shade of embarrassment crossed Klavier’s face. His arms, which he’d outstretched as if for a hug, fell.

“My phone has been on airplane mode?”

“Yeah, yeah, yeah,” she waved him off, pushing into the apartment. “I guess that works. Rock stars.”

Simon straightened. He’d managed to find an oven mitt during the greeting, and turned to see a petite woman staring up at him, a hoodie pulled over her torso and leggings. She held an oversized bag in one hand and her phone in the other, kinky hair pulled back into a ponytail. Her glasses, large and red, reflected the light of the still-open oven. She stared at him for a moment before turning back to Klavier.

“You son of a bitch,” she accused, dropping her phone in her bag. “You told me he said no!”
Klavier grinned as she smacked him on the arm, close enough to the fresh tattoo to make him hiss and cringe away.

"Ach, Frau," he murmured, holding his arm. "That’s just mean."

"You deserve it," she pointed in his face. "I’ve been spending my whole day trying to figure out how to talk you into singing again, and looks like I don’t even have to! That’s just cruel." She turned to Simon, who still held the hot, burned pizza in his hand. "You must be the magic man."

Simon turned his eyes from her to Klavier and back again. "I…?"

"Dee, this is Simon Blackquill," Klavier stepped in. "Herr Samurai, Dee Richter. Our manager."

Simon nodded down at the small black woman. "You must have the patience of a saint to have put up with a dandy like him for as long as you have."

Klavier’s jaw dropped. "Rude," he pointed at Simon.

"I like him," Dee grinned at the same time. Klavier turned his betrayed face to her, and she laughed.

"And here I was, about to order us a new pizza," Klavier continued, following her further into the apartment. Simon looked down at the ruined one again, suddenly aware that it was still hot.

"Where do I set this down?" He asked.

"Anywhere but a countertop!" Klavier called, already halfway into a new conversation with Dee. Frowning, Simon turned around in the kitchen.

The man had nothing but countertop.

Gingerly, he set the pizza on top of the fridge, and un-mitted his hand.

"Simon!" Klavier called, and he turned to see Klavier and Dee pouring over the notes. Gratefully, Simon re-entered the living room. "Defend my honor, we got a lot done today, right?"

"I suppose," he took a seat on the floor again. Dee sat on the loveseat, arms crossed on her thighs and squinting down at the legal pad. It was covered in lyrics and chord progressions, a large ‘SHEET 7’ written on the top of the page. Simon felt his stomach sink. That was the one song he’d asked Gavin to keep a secret.

Dee turned to Simon. "You wrote this?"

He felt his cheeks betray him in a hot flush. She turned to Klavier, who stood over her shoulder, typing away on his phone. As if feeling her gaze upon him, he nodded sagely.

"I told you," he grinned without looking up, and she set the paper back down.

"Okay, okay, whatever," she shook her head. "We still need to find you a band. You’ve got your singer,"

"Singers," Simon corrected. When she turned to him, he nodded at Klavier. "If I’m staying, he’s singing, too."

She inclined her head to him, then turned to Klavier again. As before, as soon as she did, he shrugged. How long had these people known each other?
“I really like him,” she grinned. “Simon, was it?”

Simon nodded, and she scrutinized him. He turned his eyes away, watching as Klavier finally looked up from his phone and shoved it into his back pocket.

“Pizza will be delivered in a few,” he announced, turning to Dee. “What are you doing?”

“Do you have a certain image in mind yet, Klav?” She asked, and he shook his head.

“Herr Samurai?”

“I wear black,” was all he had to offer.

“And wear black you will,” she pulled out a small memo pad and pen. “I’ll put together some image ideas and send them both your way. Simon, I’m going to need a phone number and email from you.”

“Sounds fair,” he nodded, and she looked up.

“Now, she looked up from her notepad. “You two need the rest of your band. How many are you thinking?”

“The usual,” Klavier finally moved to the chair on the other side of the room. He sat sideways, legs flung over one side of the armrest, back against the other. “A guitar, bass, keys, drums.”

“Keys?” She asked from her crouch.

“It’s a metal band, of course there are going to be keys,” Klavier argued, sounding offended that she’d even questioned it. “They might not play every song, but verdammit, we’re having them.”

“All right, all right,” she shook her head. “When do we do auditions?”

Simon leaned forward. “Auditions?” When Dee raised an eyebrow at him, he frowned. “Don’t we have to find them on our own?”

She let out a short laugh. “Ask Mr. Rockstar over there. I spread a few rumors that he was going to be starting a new band, and leads have been pouring in like crazy.”

Simon turned to Klavier, who shrugged. “The Gavinners weren’t big in the metal scene, but I think I pissed off enough metal players that they want to see what it’s about, at least.” Simon shrugged and turned back to Dee. “How does a week sound?” Klavier asked.

“A week?” Dee looked up.

“Two weeks?”

“Damn right, two weeks,” she shook her head. “A week. You’re crazy. What are we saying you’re going to drill ‘em on?”

“Well, personality, for one,” Klavier muttered. “If they’ve got a shady past, count me out.”

Dee fixed him with a look. “Right, I’ll make sure they fill out a dating app survey.”

Klavier returned the look, fully turning his head to face her. “I don’t want to be in a band with another murderer, Dee. I’m just being practical.”
She made a face nonetheless, but Simon saw her write ‘no dicks’ and underline it three times. “Song? Something popular, something everyone knows.”

“Ach,” Klavier waved her off. “I don’t want every yahoo or asshole with a guitar showing up.”

She set the pen down. “What, then?”

Klavier thought for a moment before he swung his legs off of the armrest, pushing up and striding into the studio.

Simon watched him go before he turned to Dee. He had little to offer in the conversation, but that didn’t stop his stomach from turning. He kept his lips pursed together, absently picking at the hem of his jeans. Gavin wouldn’t be ridiculous in his pick, would he? What if it was something he couldn’t keep up with? A part of him hoped he couldn’t, contrary to better judgment. It would be a good reason to leave, ripping off the band-aid before his hopes could get too high. He didn’t meet Dee’s eye contact, though she huffed and tried to turn to him for empathy. He hadn’t had to audition; weren’t there more obvious picks than he waiting to have the chance to play with Gavin? Ones that had no other options? Sure, Simon had taken a leave of absence, but this wasn’t his only path…

After a few minutes of rustling in the studio, Klavier returned triumphant with a single CD in a sleeve held over his head. Dee turned as he walked past her, dropping it onto the coffee table. She leaned forward, and her eyes bulged. Curious, Simon did the same.

“Dragonforce?” Dee turned to Klavier, eyes still wide. “You want me to go to the leads I’ve got saying you want them to audition with Dragonforce.”

“It’s not a difficult song once you’ve learned it,” Klavier shrugged.

“Klavier, ‘Through the Fire and Flames’ isn’t difficult,” she placed both hands on her knees, taking a serious tone. “It’s impossible.”

Klavier crossed his arms over his chest, glaring at her. “It’s not impossible.”

It might be, Simon thought to himself, picking up the disc. Of course he’d heard the song. He figured anyone born after the year 2000 had tried playing it on Guitar Hero at least once. A handwriting he didn’t recognize had scrawled ‘XXXX Gavinners 2.0 audition material XXXX’ on it. How had Dee gotten Dragonforce from that?

“I still can’t believe you can play it,” she said. “Where the hell am I supposed to find four other people in the universe who can?”

“We’ll make it worth their while,” Klavier rolled his eyes. “It’ll be our encore, so they don’t have to learn it just to forget it.”

“That doesn’t help!”

“I need people who can keep up with me, Dee,” Klavier snapped. “People who want to do this, for real. I’ll wait a month for auditions if I have to.” He nodded to the CD that Simon held up in front of him. “If the jock ass Daryan Crescend can keep up with this song, anyone can.”

That seemed to abate her anger, and pursed her lips into a line. She let our her breath in an exasperated raspberry, but kept scribbling, anyway. Klavier walked away to answer the door for the pizza man, and Simon finally let his eyebrows quirk up in concern.

Anyone, huh? He thought, gnawing on his lower lip. Anyone except me.
Chapter End Notes

Daryan Crescent is 100% the kind of monster that burns a single song onto a blank CD just to keep it as 'audition material', should he ever have to make a new band.

tumblr
playlist
aesthetic
“This is new,” Simon said as Klavier handed him the legal pad from his coffee table. It was stuck together with large metal clips, and even those looked like they had seen better days. It had only been three days since Simon had seen it last, but the tablature pinned to the front wasn’t something he’d ever seen from Gavin. The man in question plopped down in the seat next to Simon in a huff, large sunglasses still resting on the bridge of his nose. He wore a beanie over the mess of blonde hair again, and a loose sweatshirt over the new tattoo. It was over a month old now, but Simon still caught Gavin trying to itch at it every once in a while. It was obvious by now that Klavier wasn’t trying to keep up appearances for the court; in fact, Simon hardly believed that Klavier would return if he ever ran out of songs to write. His sleeve was almost complete; he remembered the man saying something about a few filler pieces to grab while they were on tour, but Simon had only been half-listening. Klavier kicked his feet up on the seat in front of him, boot laces swinging to a stop after a few moments. He rearranged the stack of papers in his hands to act as a table for his coffee before he nudged the sunglasses down.

The blue eyes behind betrayed darker lines than usual. Gavin’s expression, unamused, felt uncharacteristic of the man.

“No sleep again?” Dee asked from the other side of Simon, her notes and laptop splayed across the director’s table in the audience seating. A large megaphone sat at her other side in lieu of the microphone to the PA system. The remote to that sat next to the large bell-like device. They’d rented out the theatre for the day, and she’d beaten both of them there. She ‘tsked’ softly to herself. “You’re gonna end up looking like goth man over here if you’re not careful.”

“Goth man?” Simon turned to her.

“It was that or Bird Man, but I didn’t want to face the wrath of that thing,” Dee jabbed her pen over her shoulder in the direction of Taka, who had taken a perch atop one of the speakers. Simon grinned back at his bird.

“A wise choice,” he said in approval, and she rolled her eyes. Musicians had started filing in fifteen
minutes ago, a few congregating together to catch up, or talk about their instruments. Klavier had been thirty-three minutes late, not that Simon was counting. He’d always known that Gavin was frustratingly late to everything; couldn’t the man break a stereotype for once in his life?

“Just read it and tell me what you think,” Klavier muttered into his coffee as he took a long gulp. Simon turned his attention back to the page.

He didn’t understand much about tabs. He’d readily admit that any day of the week, so the riff didn’t mean much to him. He turned instead to the lyrics, which were crammed in between the tab lines. It was a classic Gavin move whenever he was exhausted; instead of taking a new sheet of paper like a normal human, he would try and fit all of his thoughts onto the same page. Simon had to hold the paper at arm’s length just to be able to see it, squinting.

The words weren’t anything Simon had read from Gavin previously. It was easy to tell from where—or from whom—the lyrics had come. His issues with his older brother had given the man enough fodder for his music than Simon would ever be able to credit him, yet the words were relatable and easy to learn. For all that Gavin complained that Simon was a great songwriter, Simon knew he’d never been able to compose anything like Gavin did.

This one, however, had nothing in it about wanting to live or die, but…it was about another person. Wanting to be enough for that person. As he made out the last of the lines, he could make out what used to be the phrase ‘bridging the bench’. The word ‘bench’ had been crossed out a few times, three different words taking its place. Simon frowned, and turned to Gavin.

“It’s different,” he commented, and Klavier turned to him.

“Bad different?”

“Different as in…” realization hit Simon in the head. He turned to Gavin, a sly smile on his face. “It’s more of a love song, isn’t it?”

Klavier scoffed. “Is not.”

“Yes, it is,” Simon heard the grin in his voice before he realized it was there. When was the last time he’d done that…? “Do you have someone special you’re hiding from us, Romeo-dono?”

Klavier’s face turned a beet red. “It is not a love song.” Simon raised an eyebrow, watching Gavin as he stared at the pad from where he sat, coffee still halfway to his mouth.

“What’s this?” Dee leaned around on her table, a devious grin on her face. “Klavier’s got a special someone again?”

Sputtering, Klavier shot up straight-backed in his seat. “I—,”

“I believe so,” Simon nodded to himself, reading the lyrics again.

“It is not!” Klavier insisted again, leaning closer to the page. “Tell me where you’re getting that idea!”

“You’re literally calling this person perfect,” Simon said, “Not to mention you’re implying here that you haven’t seen them in a while, but you’d never forget them.” He let the pad drop to his knees. “Is this about Justice-dono?”

Klavier’s jaw dropped, and he snatched the pad back, staring at it.
“Justice-dono?” Dee asked. She’d slowly accustomed herself to Simon’s odd honorific. “Who’s that?”

“He’s no one!” Klavier mashed out, sinking low in his seat and pushing up his sunglasses, though not before Simon saw them widen at his own lyrics. “No one at all.”

“Mhm,” Dee nodded to herself. “Sounds like no one.”

“It’s true,” Gavin murmured, though it was quiet, like he was trying to convince himself of the fact. He let the pad fall to his chest, setting the coffee on top of it.

“At least you’re over that defense attorney kid,” she continued, rearranging some of the papers on her table. “He might have inspired some good stuff, but that ‘Herr Forehead’ guy sure sounded like a trip.”

Simon’s eyes rose on his forehead, and he turned back from Dee to Gavin, whose face was as red as Dee’s glasses. “Can we just get on with the auditions, please?” Klavier asked, his voice cracking in the middle of the question.

Dee opened her mouth as if to go on, but decided against it and sat back in her seat. “Well, since you’re here, we might as well.” She turned to the megaphone next to her, turned on its head, and held it up to her mouth. “Bay Sist! You’re first!”

Simon tried to watch the proceedings with an aloof demeanor, but he found it harder and harder not to care as time went on. The small group that had gathered at the base of the audience slowly but surely dwindled, and Klavier watched with a stony expression. They quickly fell into a rhythm; Dee would call a name and instrument. The person auditioning would step up and plug into the amplifier or step up to the keys or drums. They’d then play whatever song they’d prepared to first show off their skill, and then when that was finished, Dee would start playing ’Through the Fire and Flames’. Most often, the person would sit and stare at her blankly. They’d obviously thought that the song was a joke of some sort.

The ones that played along, however…

The bassist and keyboard player came easy. Rhys Hum, a stoic redheaded man in a baggy flannel and jeans, and Stein Way, a blond man with an undercut not unlike Gavin’s, had been asked to stay late for another audition. Simon watched the two as they sat close enough to be associated with each other, but far enough to stay away from their competition. Their work had stunned him; he’d assumed that they’d known the song before the audition, but now, as they quietly chatted and shook their heads, he wasn’t sure. He felt a pit grow in his stomach. The last month had consisted of him meeting with Gavin four times a week to try and bolster his confidence. It was better, sure, but Gavin kept telling him that he’d get better the more comfortable he grew.

Now, staring at the skilled musicians around him, Simon felt a pit grow in his stomach. He’d grown accustomed to nervousness in the past, the pit of anxiety that stirred in his stomach always a familiar companion, but it had always been for something familiar, like a conversation, or a confrontation. This nervousness, this unfailing feeling of dread and failure, left him reeling. His hands buzzed in his lap, and he dug his nails into the heel of his hand to try and quiet them. A guitarist stood on the stage now, half-muddling half-expertly finding his way through Gavin’s song. That did little to abate
his anxiety.

They’ll leave when they realize their lead singer is a pansy who can’t sing in front of other people, or by himself, Simon thought with another wave of uselessness. He bit his lips together and sunk lower in his seat. The song came to a close, and Dee turned to Gavin, who was absently tapping his nose with his forefinger, elbow resting on the armrest next to him. He’d been oddly silent throughout the proceedings, but Simon could see the wheels turning in his head. For all that Gavin postured and joked around, Simon knew there was a brilliant mind in there. He was just…extra. The megaphone squealed to life.

“Jack Maeger, please stay for a second audition.”

Jack, the guitarist, perked up at that, and flipped the amp off before yanking the cord out of his guitar and stepping aside. Simon watched him join Rhys and Stein, and pursed his lips together. Three out of the four were there, they just needed a drummer. He turned to Gavin again, who had removed his hand from his face and kicked his legs back up onto the seat in front of him. He went back to fidgeting with the hem of his flannel. Simon turned from him to the remaining hopefuls, who were a surprisingly thin bunch at this point.

Only four held drum sticks, three men and one woman.

“Is this what going well looks like?” He asked quietly, and Klavier looked up at him. An eyebrow rose on the man’s face.

“Going…well?” He parroted as a woman with her guitar moved to stand on the stage.

“Yeah,” Simon nodded, gesturing to the ‘crowd’. “We’ve been here almost all day, and yet we haven’t found a drummer.”

Klavier waved him off with a nonchalant grin and wave of the hand. “Drummers are always the hardest to find,” he said, eyeing up the girl as she set up. “And, most often, the first to go.”

Simon sat back in his seat, still uncomfortable. His anxiety bubbled inside of him, practically begging to be let out into some sort of question or another. Usually, when he got like this, Taka would notice, and the bird would come to his aid.

The bird, however, made no move to join him. Simon fought against the need to turn around in his seat to ensure that he was still there.

Simon turned from him to the remaining hopefuls, who were a surprisingly thin bunch at this point.

A samurai wouldn’t need to fidget, anyway, he chided himself, and placed his hands on his knees. His questions, his anxieties…they all burned through the lining in his stomach. He wasn’t used to people accommodating for him. Not without wanting something in return. He could feel his insides turning, and his left middle fingernail bit through the first layer of skin. Stop it, he thought to himself, finally remembering the feather he kept in his pocket. He took it out and fingered it, already feeling a little better. If he couldn’t call Taka to him in that moment, at least he could have one of his feathers. He kept his eyes directed at the seat in front of him as the woman mailed her prepared song, but then admitted she’d thought Klavier’s audition song was a joke. Dee dismissed her and crossed another name off of her notepad. So many names, Simon thought to himself. So many people who sought this out, who wanted to be in a band with Gavin for a long time.

And Simon…?

Well, he’d gone along with Klavier’s game for the moment, but realistically, he was unsure if he’d really, really ever be able to perform in front of anyone except Taka.
Of course you won’t, a voice hissed to him, and he glanced at the man sitting next to him. It’s pointless to try. If you were even a little considerate, you’d tell Gavin now. Stop wasting his time.

Simon opened his mouth as if to try and argue, only to realize that the voice was in his head. He turned to Klavier, who had leaned forward in his seat, phone held up to his ear and other hand pressed to his other in an attempt to hear what the person on the other line was saying. Simon hadn’t even heard it go off. He was hunched over, elbows on either side of his knees and chest pressed to his own thighs.

Simon froze. He fought back the coldness seeping through his skin, the feeling of overworked air conditioning piercing his brain. Absently, Klavier rocked back and forth in his seat, still trying to hear the other person on the line. Simon’s breath left him in a whoosh.

“He isn’t…well,” the guard said quietly, walking by Simon as they wound their way through the prison. Simon eyed the man. Was he really just now noticing this?

“An astute observation, Keye-dono,” Simon said, hefting the weight of the file under his arm. Sure, it had been extensive before he’d seen it but he’d added notes and further case files to it since. Now, in his awkward, shackled grasp, it felt like it was about to spill open. “I could have told you that after day one.”

Loch N. Keye, Simon’s current handler, gave him a dry look. “It’s been different since you saw him last. I think he finally snapped.”

Despite himself, Simon’s eyebrows rose on his forehead. He wiggled his teeth, one of Taka’s feathers bobbing up and down as they waked. He’d been expecting this day for the past six months; the prison had taken advantage of his psychology background and finally put him to good use, something for which Simon would be forever grateful. As they walked now to his patient, Simon felt a wave of nervousness. It hit him every time they came into the solitary ward. He’d spent enough time in there to know that he never wanted to go back, but his patient would never leave it. At least they let Simon pretend he still had a stable life.

“It’s been two days,” Simon muttered. “How much can one man change in two days?”

Loch eyed him. “You read the file.”

“A man like him is most likely to bounce back after an episode like that.”

The guard sighed. “Wait until you see him for yourself. He’s been denying visitors left and right.”

Simon’s eyebrows rose on his forehead, but he didn’t press the matter as Loch opened the first two doors into his patient’s cell.

His patient.

Six—almost seven—years of the same routine; get up, line up, breakfast, work, outside, work, dinner, line up, bed; had all but dulled his mind. He’d just gotten to second in line for The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn (after years of reading Tom Sawyer over and over again) when the guards had called him into one of the visitor rooms and given him…this. It was a breath of fresh air in the hopeless stench of an oil field.
The third door opened, and Simon stared at the man, the same mixed feeling that washed over him whenever he entered returning. He’d initially studied law, but had found that the extra time between classes left him bored. He’d taken up psychology in the interim. He wasn’t licensed, per se, but for a prison psychologist, the warden figured he’d do.

Especially when his ‘patient’ had been sentenced to solitary confinement before his execution. It was a loose term; he could still see the occasional guest, but had also been given the right to refuse any visitors he wished. Simon assumed it had been a deal with one of the guards, but he’d never questioned it. As it stood now, the man was only forced to see himself and the guards.

As he stared, he realized he should have paid more attention to Loch.

Kristoph Gavin’s cell was usually so prim, so proper—Simon stared at it now, a mess of book shelves and stuffing from his armchair, in awe. The bottle of nail polish he kept on the end table he’d ordered was smashed against the wall, the clear liquid dried into globs of liquid on the concrete. Shards of glass had yet to be swept up, crusted into the polish. The man himself stood with his back to the door, both hands on his armchair. Occasionally, he’d flip one hand to the side, and a new piece of stuffing would fall from his fingers and drift to the floor below. Simon watched with a careful eye. He’d seen inmates snap before. In fact, he’d been on the receiving end of a few snaps, which had landed him in solitary once. He took a deep breath. If this landed him in solitary again, at least it would be a short jaunt.

A prod at his back jolted him out of his thoughts, and he turned to see Loch nod at the man standing in the middle of the room. With a deep breath, Simon entered the cell, the stench of nail polish—poisoned nail polish, he recalled from his notes—burning in his nostrils. He took measured steps, feeling for the pen inside his file. He’d become a master at flipping it in and out with one hand, and he did so now. Loch had—thankfully—fastened a blank piece of paper to the front of the file. Simon rested the pen on the front of the page, leaving it shut. If he was going to get anything out of Kristoph, he would have to be careful.

“Do you know the story of Oedipus, Blackquill?” The man asked. His voice, usually so careful and measured, wavered as he spoke. More stuffing fell to the floor. Simon stepped over it easily, stopping directly behind Kristoph. He faced the wall, his dominant hand facing the man’s back. If Kristoph decided to try and take him out, he’d only have to flip the file toward the man to distract him, and then he could attack with the pen. Mighty uneven odds, he thought to himself. A man sentenced to the rest of his life in solitary confinement without shackles versus a murderer sent to live the rest of his life in them.

You aren’t a murderer, a voice whispered to him. He shoved it down.

“How’s the one where the kid marries his mother?” Simon asked, keeping a close eye on the man. The one curl he usually styled his hair into was undone, the curly platinum blonde hair falling into disarray at his shoulders. Kristoph snorted.

“An enormous understatement, but yes.” Another piece of stuffing. “It’s the one where the ‘kid’ marries his ‘mother.’”

“What about it?”

Silence. Simon watched as the cotton drifted to the floor, landing on one of Kristoph’s—Simon had to do a double take, socked feet. He’d never seen the man without his shoes.

“It’s much more than a boring story for tenth graders,” he shook his head. “Honestly, it’s wasted on them.” A long rip. When Kristoph’s hand came to the side again, it was to drop a piece of
fuchsia velvet. The fabric flopped to the floor. “It’s a story about destiny, Blackquill.”

Simon snorted. “Balderdash.”

“I used to think so, as well,” he mused. His hands fell still on the chair, and Simon turned his eyes toward them, tensing as if for an attack. He’d been in a few scraps in the past year, and was fairly confident that he could take Gavin in a tussle. “Not so much anymore.”

Simon had also heard of men snapping as their execution grew closer, but he’d always just assumed that Gavin was different than that. The man was pristine. In a shit-filled fortress, Kristoph Gavin had seemed...untouchable.

His hands fell from the armchair, and he turned, slowly, to Simon.

It was in that moment Simon realized how wrong he’d been.

Gavin hadn’t slept. His eyes, two almost-pupils, stared wildly at him, and he’d clawed at most of his hair. His glasses were gone, and his mouth kept twitching up as if it were trying to smile. His shoes had been removed, usually starched suit disheveled and awkwardly pulled over hunched shoulders. He’d missed the proper button in the front. Simon felt the disgust boil in his stomach. With his own execution little more than a year away, he silently prayed this wasn’t in store for him.

“Why the sudden change?” He asked, keeping his voice and face passive. Kristoph, he knew, was a master at manipulation, even more so than Simon himself. He’d have to tread carefully. Kristoph let out a sick laugh.

“I, Blackquill, have reached my destiny. Beaten by my own hand.”

Simon’s eyebrow rose on his forehead. Of course he’d read the trial’s transcript, but he hadn’t expected...this.

“From what I remember,” he started, stepping forward to examine the spilled nail polish closer, “You were beaten by Phoenix Wright.”

“'Bah,’” Kristoph waved a hand, stumbling around the chair. “A pawn.”

“An expensive pawn,” Simon turned toward him. “You told me you spent seven years trying to get that man to break.” Kristoph had told him a lot of things, but Simon kept that mostly to himself. He hadn’t written most of it down. It was better, he figured, if most of the man’s secrets died after his own execution.

“A hack, nonetheless,” Kristoph snarled.

“So you were beaten by Apollo Justice,” Simon tried.

Kristoph barked a laugh. The conversation seemed to be bringing out the same Kristoph Simon was used to. He crouched and plucked a book from the floor. “Lucky rookie.”


The page ripped in Kristoph’s hand. Simon turned his head to see Kristoph standing there, right hand clenched around the paper. The scar on his hand bulged, and his metacarpals stuck out more so than usual. He raised an eyebrow.
“He had nothing to do with this,” Kristoph mashed out of his teeth. “As usual, he froze up like a child. He is a child.”

“From what I read,” Simon continued. If he could just get the man to open up… “Without him, Justice-dono would have lost you.” The paper crumpled as Kristoph readjusted his grip. That’s it, Simon thought. Suggest what he’s worried about. “He bested you.”

“He won’t last,” Kristoph tore another page from the book. There was a distanced look in his eyes, as if he didn’t realize that his hands kept tearing out pages. Simon watched them fall, mourning the wreckage. He would have killed for a new book, and he refused to read Tom Sawyer for a fourteenth time. “He can’t live without someone keeping him in line.” Suddenly, Simon felt Loch’s gaze on him.

“So you’ve been turning him away?”

“Let him suffer,” Kristoph tore another page. “There’s no other way he’ll learn.”

“He’ll move on,” Simon finally turned his body to face Kristoph’s almost five feet away. “He’ll get to live past you or I.”

“No, he won’t,” Kristoph sneered. “I give him a year.”

“You really think you’re that important to him?” Simon took a step closer. “He won’t need you anymore.” He could see that he was getting under Kristoph’s skin, and he only needed to twist the dagger a little further….

Perhaps,” he nodded. The pages came quicker. “But he’ll never best me.”

“Kristoph,” Simon deadpanned. “You’re slated to be executed soon. I don’t know if you’ve noticed, but he’s already bested you. In his career, his personal life, his—”

The book flew past Simon’s head and smacked against the wall behind him. He’d seen Kristoph move, in fact, he’d been expecting some sort of physical retaliation to his words, but the ferocity of the snarl that came from Kristoph had stunned him.

“Without me,” Kristoph hissed. “He would not exist!” He stalked forward. “Do you have any idea what I’ve done for that fool? The toll it’s taken on me?” He stepped closer to Simon, not even noticing the pages he kicked in the process. “Do you have any idea what it’s like to constantly be compared to your lesser? Klavier is a fool, Blackquill. Had you any feeling of affection in that heart of yours, you’d know what it’s like to give up your life for someone.”

Simon stiffened, and the image of a small, redheaded girl with massive headphones flashed through his head. She was crying—standing over the body—covered in blood—screaming on the witness stand—

He grew cold, but Kristoph wasn’t done.

“The man won’t survive,” Kristoph hissed. “He can’t survive without someone controlling him. It’s how he works. Soon he’ll push away everyone, and you watch, you fool,” he turned on his heel back toward the chair. “You watch. Within a year you’ll be reading headlines of Klavier Gavin’s suicide. He’s weak.”

A clang came on the door to the outside, and Simon glanced up to see Loch gesture to wrap it up. Simon gratefully took the out, looking over his shoulder as he left.
“He’s weak, he’s weak, he’s weak,” Kristoph was muttering to himself. He’d sat, and as he repeated the words to himself, he leaned forward in his seat, elbows on either side of his knees and chest pressed to his thighs. His hands were clenched in his hair, and he rocked slightly.

Simon shuddered, shoving the memories of Athena to the back of his head.

It doesn’t matter, he thought to himself. In fourteen months, it’ll be over.

“Simon!” A voice came from in front of him, and Simon blinked to see Klavier Gavin staring at him, sunglasses pushed up on his head, and hands hovering over Simon’s shoulders as if he were trying to shake him. Simon flinched back, blinking a few times at the man before turning back to the stage. The woman drummer was just finishing her song, and Dee picked up the megaphone to prepare her for Klavier’s audition song. The song started over the PA system and Klavier leaned close. “Are you all right, Herr Samurai?”


The brothers did look eerily similar, however, and the fact ate at Simon’s subconscious. He frowned deeper, crossing his arms over his chest. Sure, he had to fight many similar flashbacks away whenever something triggered him, but never was it so…visceral. Klavier and Kristoph’s similarities were too real for comfort. Even with Klavier’s buzzed head, the similar postures made it hard to focus on anything else. Klavier still watched him with a frown.

“You most definitely are not ‘fine’,” he murmured, and Simon wrinkled his nose. Even if he were to find the words to say, how would that sound to him? You look like your brother, who I’ve met. Who I counseled up until he was executed. Sorry, did I forget to mention that, Gavin-dono?

“Drop it, fop-dono,” Simon hissed, trying to focus on the woman. What was her name? She was keeping up with the song expertly, and Simon tried to focus on her instead.

“I just want to make sure you’re okay,” Klavier hissed back, and Simon felt his embarrassment, and in tandem, his anger, flare. “You were out for almost three minutes.”

“Drop—it,” Simon mashed out of his teeth. Damn it Gavin, not now. You’re great at pushing buttons, I get it. Just leave me alone. He couldn’t trust himself when he got embarrassed. Klavier fell silent, turning to the stage again. His face was unreadable, and Simon took the feather from his left hand and stuck the end in his mouth. He gnawed on it for a moment before Klavier leaned over to him.

“If you want to talk about it—,”

“For fuck’s sake,” Simon yelled, pushing himself to his feet. The room fell silent; the song had ended not three seconds prior to Klavier’s interruption. Simon could feel all eyes on him. Damn it, he thought again, and started storming out. He’d been able to keep a low enough profile when he worked at the Prosecutor’s Office, why was it now that he was trying to get better that he couldn’t control himself?

Klavier, obviously taken aback, stared after Simon. He blinked a few times before rushing after him, stopping to turn back to Dee and tap his forehead three times before taking off after his singer at full
speed. A wave of panic washed over him, and he ran down the aisle, catching Simon before he could exit through the audience wings.

“Herr Samurai!” He spread his hands in front of himself, creating a barrier. In the dim light he could hardly see Simon’s face, but it was so red Klavier didn’t have to guess why he’d run away.

_I didn’t even know he was capable of embarrassment_, Klavier thought absently as Dee asked the drummer, Betsy Driver, to stay for another audition.

“Herr Samurai, _talk to me_,” Klavier said sternly, before adding, “Bitte,” softly.

Simon stared at him, almost incredulous, nostrils flared. Klavier stared at him, banking on his annoying presence to pull something out of the man. Simon huffed quietly, turning his face away. He bit his lip, and Klavier set his hands on his hips. Dee, bless her, had continued calling people up to the stage in his absence. Klavier didn’t _really_ care what anyone else brought to the table; the four they’d selected were as good as signed in his book. He stared up at Simon with growing impatience.

“It’s the song,” Simon finally muttered quietly, still not looking at him. Klavier blinked, and drew back a little.

“Which one?” He asked softly, and Simon turned sideways, gesturing to the theater. Klavier could see the guitarist, Jack was his name, watching them carefully. He stepped up next to Simon looking out at the seats.

“The audition one,” Simon explained. “The one you were _so adamant_ about someone being able to play.”

Klavier frowned. “It’s a staple,” he said simply before looking up at Simon. “What about it?”

“Why did you pick it?”

His frown deepened, and he turned back to Simon. “We went over this with Dee; I need a band that can keep up with me. What better than to do a song I can hardly keep up with?”

“A band that can keep up with you,” Simon parroted with a nod. “What if I can’t keep up with you?”

Klavier stopped, suddenly feeling cold. He turned to Simon. “What do you mean?”

“I can’t sing this,” Simon explained.

“You can’t sing this _yet_,” Klavier corrected, and Simon angrily waved a hand.

“Stop saying that,” he snapped. “You don’t know that it’s a for sure thing.”

“I do though,” Klavier insisted, turning to face Simon head-on. “You’re getting there, Herr Samurai, you just need a little more coaching. Give me another few weeks—,”

“_Weeks_?” Simon repeated, looming over him. Klavier had to remind himself not to back down. A part of him slipped back into Klavier Gavin, rockstar, and he squared his shoulders. It was an easy persona to fall back into; he’d only lived his life until recently in it, after all. “You didn’t give these people—people who have practiced over and over again to play in a band with the Klavier Gavin—weeks. What if I _can’t_ keep up with you?”
Zum Teufel noch mal, Klavier hated it when people used his own words against him. Distraught, he raised a hand to his forehead, looking out at the bassist up on the stage. He was mediocre, his fingers hardly landing in the proper positions—stop it, he thought to himself. Now isn’t the time to be rockstar Gavin, your singer needs manager Gavin. His mind swam for a moment before he finally turned back to Simon.

“Herr Samurai, I don’t think you’re understanding me right,” he said, lowering his hand and gesturing out to the house. “They have to keep up with me, but we’ll do anything for you.”

Simon frowned at that. “You know I don’t like special treatment.” Klavier spread his hands to the sides, leaning back.

“And you know I need you if this is going to work,” he countered. “Simon, you’re going to be fine. Do you trust me?”

Simon fixed him with a look. “No.”

Klavier’s face fell. “You don’t?”

“I don’t trust you—yet.” He said it with the hint of a grin, one which Klavier couldn’t help but return. He clapped him on the shoulder, and gestured to the house. Simon waved him off, but Klavier moved to return back to his seat. The musicians had come for a chance to work with him; he might as well keep up the appearances. He left Simon in the wing, winding his way back to the seats, and trying to ignore the pointed look from the guitarist that had been sitting close enough to hear the conversation.

Chapter End Notes

It took me more time than I’d like to admit to come up with the band’s names.
I'm indestructible,
Determination that is incorruptible.
From the other side a terror to behold,
Annihilation will be unavoidable.
Every broken enemy will know
That their opponent had to be invincible.

Who's ready for these people to just...be a band?
I'M ready for these people to just be a band. Goodness.
No better time than the present, lemme know what you think in the comments!

Thanks for reading everyone, somehow we're already almost to 800 hits on this sucker,
and how that happened, I have no idea. A little shorter chapter this time, but hoping that
the world building is mostly done after this one so we can just get into the meat and potatoes.

Klavier was late.

Again.

He cursed to himself. He’d promised Herr Samurai that he’d work on his tardiness, but all that had
left with him was a few more apologies to make and an unending sense of guilt. He felt the
backpack strapped to his back shift as he rounded one of the corners on his way to the practice space,
the weight of his belongings teetering on its perch. He grit his teeth in frustration as he blew through
the yellow light at the intersection, risking a glance in his rearview mirror to ensure no police officers
were there. He let out a sigh of relief as he sped away, turning his head back to focus on his route.
He’d been to the practice space a few times in the past weeks; he and Simon had increased their
sessions to four times a week, and Klavier had used every moment he wasn’t with Herr Samurai
spent with Dee. Parts of the band could only be ironed out with careful help from her perspective,
though he was adamant in leaving the majority of it to be a group decision. Moving his and Simon’s
sessions to the practice space had been a good idea at first. He’d hoped to get the man used to
singing outside of Klavier’s apartment and his own office, however, the man was growing
increasingly difficult.

He’d luckily left his guitar at the space after the last session with Blackquill, he realized as he took
another corner at speed, whipping past an officer. Luckily, the cop was already busy writing up
another poor driver, but Klavier felt his stomach twist nonetheless. Blackquill was starting to loosen
up…around him. Klavier kept telling himself that he’d get better the more they practiced around
others, however, every time Dee entered the room, it was as if they were back at square one. Klavier let out a long sigh in his helmet, and the moisture of the gesture fogged up the glass. He cursed quietly to himself and skidded around the corner, trying to ignore the sounds of a horn honking behind him.

*Nothing personal, Schatzi, he thought, I just can’t be late.*

*Well. Later than I already am.*

When he skidded into the driveway at the practice space, however, Dee was already waiting for him, arms crossed over her chest.

“Ah, Dee,” Klavier greeted her as he pulled off his helmet, doing his best to flip the hair back into place. Given that the woman’s only response was a raised eyebrow, he reached up to feel at the tufts of hair sticking up from the static. He’d just had the hairs cut short again; he’d been too scared to face the wrath of his normal hairdresser, so he’d simply returned to the same woman he’d so ungratefully scared when he’d first chopped it all off. Of course, it had been more of an ordeal this time around, since he didn’t have the luxury of a snap decision to hide behind. The woman had recognized him as Klavier Gavin, superstar, and he’d had to plaster on the rockstar face for an agonizingly long amount of time.

“You’re late,” Dee deadpanned, and Klavier tucked the helmet under his arm. He opened his mouth as if to speak, but she fixed him with a look. “Later than usual,” she corrected herself.

“How are they doing?” He asked, moving past her and into the small studio. It was split between two practice rooms, and Klavier dropped the helmet to the bench with a ‘thunk’. He quickly shed the leather jacket, resisting the urge to reach over and scratch at his phoenix tattoo. It was healing nicely, and, not for the first time that week, he wondered why people had such a vendetta against snap decisions.

“They’ve learned the stuff you sent them,” Dee offered. “So that’s something.”

“I would hope so,” Klavier stretched as he keyed into a locker and grabbed his guitar. “After making them learn Dragonforce, this must have been easy as pie. Herr Samurai?”

“Simon?” She asked, looking into the space from the recording area. “He’s…uh. He’s sure something.”

Klavier peeked through the large window into the space to see the man sitting with arms crossed over his chest, watching the others with a skeptical eye. He’d perched near the keyboard they’d worked with so often, and Klavier had to suppress a smile. *A safety blanket, Blackquill?* As he took in the rest of the crew, he was grateful to see that the keyboardist was just beginning his setup.

“He sure is,” Klavier turned to Dee. “How are the press releases coming?”

“I’m sure the public will be happy to hear something from you, and not the rumors that have been going around.”

“Rumors you started.”

Dee fixed him with a sly grin. “I do what I can.” She took in a sharp breath as if to go into another tangent, but her nose turned up at the whiff. “Klav?”

Klavier gave her a wink before he opened the door into the space. A moment later, the woman’s
hand appeared on it, and pushed it shut again. Klavier blinked at the door, still holding onto the knob. He’d thought he’d—

“Klav,” she said, quieter this time. Klavier was forced to look into her dark eyes. Behind the red frames, they pierced into his own, and he felt the blood leave his face. “am I smelling…brandy?”

Klavier’s eyes widened, and he pressed his lips together in a moment of shock. He’d brushed his teeth…hadn’t he? What about his cologne?

“Nein,” he shook his head, hoping the gesture would cover up his blush at the lie. The shirt, he thought, remembering the night before in a sudden burst of panic. You spilled on your shirt last night and you were in too much of a rush to clean it up before you left, idiot. “Must be imagining things,” he said.

“Klavier,” she said again, inclining her head with a cautionary tone.

“I’m fine, Dee,” he said, hand still on the door. Had she not brought it up, he would have forgotten about it himself.

“You just drove here,” she insisted. “On your death trap motorcycle!”

“I just needed to finish off what was from last night,” he said with a wave of the hand. “Hardly enough to get a buzz.”

“It’s not even noon yet!”

“Bitte, Dee,” he caught her eye, and she relented slightly, lips still pursed in a frown. “Please. Drop it.” She bit the inside of her lip, and he could see the cogs turning in her head. “I’m late enough already, can we talk about this later?”

She softened again, and eventually crossed her arms over her chest. “Fine. But you promise that you’ll talk to me if you ever need to?”

Klavier sighed, and rolled his eyes. It wasn’t a problem, so what was hers?

“Fine,” he eyed her. “Happy?”

“I just don’t want this to be a problem,” she responded, but let him get near the door again. Klavier sized up the petite woman, her pursed lips, crossed arms, and cocked eyebrow. She was a good friend, yes…

But he needed her as a manager, not a friend. Friends got close. Friends set expectations. Friends betrayed people.

Klavier started at the last bit, blinking a few times. Where had that come from?

“It won’t be,” he waved it off quickly. More than it already is. For the second time, Klavier opened the door into the brighter, quieter recording area. All five heads turned to him, and he absently scratched his newly shaved undercut.

“Tut mir leid, dass ich zu spät bin!” He grinned, and when he was met with blank stares, he sighed. “Sorry I’m late,” he nodded.

“We started thinking you weren’t even going to show,” Betsy, the drummer, quipped from behind the glass partition. As Klavier walked over to his part of the room, he shrugged.
“It’s my job to keep you all on your toes,” he grinned, plugging in. “Have you all run through anything yet?”

“Not yet,” Rhys, the bassist, piped in. He was perched atop his amplifier, fingers idly noodling a bass line. “It’s hard to play together when you’ve never met.”

Klavier turned to him, and was met with a steady stare. In his experience, there were two types of bassists; the energetic, witty, excitable puppy, or the stoic, cut-to-the-chase musician. Rhys Hum was definitely the latter.

“Sicherlich,” Klavier slung the guitar over his shoulder and rested an arm on it. “My apologies. I am Klavier Gavin, as you all know. Lead guitar, backup singer, et cetera.” He waved his hand, a little miffed they hadn’t taken care of this earlier. Of course he’d had conversations with everyone individually, so he figured that a few adults would have been able to introduce themselves, especially if they were planning to be in a band together.

Next to him, behind a partition of glass to deaden the sound of the drum set, Betsy Driver raised her hand in a short wave.

“Betsy Driver,” she said. Klavier knew from past experiences that she was a tall woman, though behind her set she looked almost…diminutive. Her chin-length blonde hair bobbed out from a bandana wrapped around her ears and tied on the top of her head. The tank top and cargo shorts she wore couldn’t have been warm in the air conditioned building, but she bore no trace of goose bumps.

“Drums. Obviously.”

Klavier let himself grin at the attitude, but turned to the next person nonetheless.

“Uh, Rhys Hum,” the bassist nodded. The ginger man looked as though he hadn’t gotten a haircut in a while, the red hair flopping around his ears despite the gel trying to support it. He looked more dressed for the cool indoors than Betsy, the sleeves of his bomber jacket pushed up to his shoulders, and loose jeans covering down to his ankles. His brown eyes darted over to Betsy, and he had a moment of thought before he pursed his lips and set his hands back on his instrument. “Bass.”

The keyboardist poked his head over the array of keyboards in front of him, obviously trying to figure out the cords necessary to make his setup work. “Stein Way,” he said. Like Betsy, he was tall, and from the other side of the room, Klavier could have sworn that he’d give Simon a run for his money. They were built relatively the same way, except the man easily grinned, and his hair kept falling into his face. He pushed it away with a sigh, turning to the cords strewn over the floor. He’d rolled up the sleeves of his button-up, but his face was flushed. For a moment, Klavier couldn’t help feeling grateful that someone was late, like him. “Keyboards. I could’ve sworn I put that connector in here somewhere…”

“Maybe if you had shown up early you would’ve already had your shit set up,” the guitarist next to him grumped, sitting on the other side of Blackquill. Stein turned to him with a raised eyebrow.

“What’s your deal?” He asked. “I show up a few minutes late and you haven’t given me a break since. Did someone piss in your Cheerios this morning or something?”

“I don’t have a deal,” he said defensively. “I just want to know when the hell we’re supposed to start practicing. No need for me to get here early if we’re not even going to start on time.”

“Entschuldigung,” Klavier leaned forward to grab the two’s attention. “But you are…?”

The guitarist soured again. He had long black hair that hung to his shoulders, which he constantly
flipped out of his face. His beard, most likely shaved so that it constantly looked disheveled, matched it in color. He wore a loose band t-shirt, and Klavier caught him sitting straight up a few times, only to slouch back down. *Trying too hard, are we?* He thought to himself, noticing the man’s itch to keep noodling on his guitar. “Jack Maeger. Guitar.”

“Jack,” Klavier nodded. “How many bands have you been in?”

Jack’s face cleared, obviously confused by the question. “A few, why?”

“Out of those, which have had members arrive on time, let alone early?”

His face wrinkled. “Almost all of them.”

Klavier allowed himself to grin. “And which of those bands are still together?”

To his great pleasure, Klavier caught Simon’s mouth twitching up at the slight. Jack’s lips pursed into a frown, and he seemed to retreat into his shell all the more.

“I don’t mean any disrespect, I’m genuinely curious.”

“Yeah, yeah,” Jack muttered, noodling on his guitar again. “I just don’t like to wait.”

“We’ll do our best to be on time,” Klavier gave Stein a wink over the keyboards, for which the man seemed to be grateful. He pulled his long blond hair into a ponytail, showing off the buzzed head underneath. “But unfortunately, every time I try to make a promise, I seem to break it. It’s nothing personal, I promise.” The comment landed in the room as if it were supposed to be an unspoken rule, and Klavier let it lie for a moment before he turned to Simon. “Would you like to continue, Herr Samurai?”

Simon blinked a few times before he sat a little straighter, but his arms remained crossed over his chest. He’d worn a long sleeved black t-shirt and jeans, but even without the court getup, he was still intimidating.

“Simon Blackquill; I do vocals.”

Betsy’s eyebrow rose on her forehead, and Rhys turned to the man with a little more interest in his face. Klavier caught the two and grinned again to himself. *If we can get that same reaction from everyone else and their mothers, we might just have a hit on our hands, after all.* If Simon noticed the reaction, he didn’t show it, and slouched back into his nonchalant pose.

“Excellent,” Klavier clapped his hands together. “Now that we have that out of the way, I’m a firm believer that music is the only way to make musicians friends. So, I assume you all listened to what I’d sent out?”

“And improved upon,” Betsy’s sticks clicked together as she grabbed her ear plugs. “I gotta say, Gavin. You’re a kickass guitarist, but maybe let a pro do your drumming.”

“Call me Klavier or Klav, bitte,” he cringed. “I’m not terribly fond of being called ‘Gavin’.”

“You got it, K,” she said, turning to the rest of the band. Klavier turned to Simon, who watched him with a content look on his face. *It’s a first,* he tried to convey in the shrug he gave back to Simon.

Simon reluctantly stood, eyeing the microphone with a careful caution. Klavier noticed the man’s apprehension and sighed. It wasn’t going to get any better unless he just threw him right into it. Klavier took a deep breath once Betsy started clicking them off. He started in on one of his riffs.
He’d briefed them shortly on the order in which he wanted to practice beforehand, and so when everyone joined at their proper places, he felt himself relax. This wasn’t so scary. Working with professional musicians never ceased to amaze him, especially after the years he’d spent trying to get Daryan to focus for the first half of their Gavinners practices. He nodded along to the rhythm, and let himself feel excited.

Until Simon missed his cue.

Klavier’s eyes immediately shot up to the man, who was staring at the microphone with an intensity that he hadn’t seen in a few days, when Dee had surprised them in their practice. The music continued on, luckily enough. Klavier turned to Betsy and nodded, and she cut out. The disjointed sounds of people slowly stopping their parts sounded in the room, and Simon’s eyes widened.

*Unfortunately, Herr Samurai, I can’t teach you how to not be shy,* Klavier thought. “Everything okay, Herr Samurai?”

Were the look possible, Klavier was certain that Simon’s face would have turned red. As it were, the man’s cheeks simply emptied in color.

“Sure,” Simon muttered, not meeting the eyes of anyone in the room. Klavier’s mouth turned up, and he looked around the room on the man’s behalf. *Of all times,* Klavier did his best not to roll his eyes, and gave Betsy an apologetic look.

“Might we try that again, Fraulein?”

She shrugged and started again, however, it was Rhys who missed his cue this time. Instead of starting over, however, this time Betsy managed to keep the same beat going, and the song marched its way to the verse.

This time, Simon’s mouth started moving, but nothing came through the speakers. Klavier sighed. He would never admit it out loud, but a part of him wanted to shake Simon until the man just began to *sing.* When they had looped around again, Klavier leaned forward until he could see Simon’s eyes, and gave an exaggerated nod when it was his turn to come in.

Again, Simon missed his cue.

Jack was the first to stop playing, and Klavier winced. He could feel the agitation in the room, and it was all he could do not to feed into it, as well. *He* knew that they all needed Simon, but he needed everyone else to know, as well. Slowly the rest of the group stopped playing as well, and Klavier finally quieted his own instrument by cupping his right hand over the strings. He reached up and pulled one earplug out of his ear, taking a step toward Simon.

“Herr Samurai?” He asked, but from the looks of it, Simon’s ears were deafened to the sound, thanks to the ear plugs. He reached out a hand as if to gently prod the man back to earth, but Simon looked up before he could.

“Did I miss it again?” He asked, his voice raised over the deafening effect of his ear plugs. Klavier caught Stein and Rhys’ grins, and he bit his lips together in the hopes of saving some of the poor man’s face.

“We can try it again from the top,” Klavier offered, turning to Betsy and Jack, who shrugged. He turned to Stein and Rhys with a pleading look, and both nodded. At least he could find encouragement from two of the four, he figured.

“I’d like to get my part better this time,” Stein offered, and Klavier gave him a grateful smile.
“Then, Fraülein, if you wouldn’t mind?” Klavier turned to her with a grin, and she fixed him with a flat stare before apathetically clicking her sticks together. Klavier made sure to keep his eye on Blackquill this time, and this time, when it came time for him to sing…

Simon missed the cue, and this time, his cheeks flushed. Klavier shot Betsy a look as if to say ‘cover me’, and turned to Simon, stilling his hands on the guitar. Simon didn’t meet his eye again, and Klavier readjusted the strap on his shoulder so his guitar was pointing neck toward the floor. He stepped up to Simon with an insistent look, and Simon, finally catching his eye, shook his head, finally holding up his hands in frustrated surrender. Klavier turned to Betsy and held up a hand, signaling for her to pause. She did so, and he turned back to Simon with a curious look.

“I—” Simon said before anyone could speak before him. At the sound of his own voice, however, he shied away from the microphone to speak at the same volume as everyone else. “I can’t do this.” Klavier recoiled as if he’d been stung.

No, he thought. Not now…

“What do you mean, ‘you can’t do this’?” He asked. “We’ve been working for months, Herr Sam —,”

Simon’s icy glare made the nickname stick in Klavier’s throat. He swallowed the bit of annoyance he felt toward the man nonetheless.

“I mean this was a stupid idea,” he elaborated.

“Do you not remember your cue…”?

“It’s not that,” Simon rolled his eyes. “We’ve been singing the same song for months. Of course know my cue, but…” he looked up, as if remembering there were others in the room for the first time. He—almost reflexively—shied away at the attention, leaning in so he could speak more quietly. “You should probably just find a new vocalist.” With that, he turned, and Klavier felt like the rug underneath his feet had been pulled away.

“Excuse me?” He sputtered at full volume, taking a few dazed steps after the man. The guitar around his shoulders yanked him back as soon as he reached the end of the cord, and he yelped, suddenly remembering his reach.

“I said you can find yourself a new vocalist,” Simon repeated, turning his head back over his shoulder. “I’m out.”

“Blackquill,” Klavier hurriedly removed the guitar from his person and hung it on the wall before dashing over in front of the door before Simon could storm out. He recrossed his arms, refusing to shrink back when Simon loomed over him. He’d stood up to Simon’s wrath before, he could do it again…right? “Blackquill, listen to me, we need you.”

“If you would get over yourself and just sing on your own, there wouldn’t be a difference,” Simon shot back.

“I gotta agree with Simon,” Betsy chimed in from behind them, and Klavier leaned around Simon to shoot her with an infuriated look. She refused to waver, however, instead opting to point at Simon with a stick. “I’m still a little confused as to why he’s our singer, and not the already Grammy-winning lead singer.” From the corner of his eye, he could see Jack shrug in agreement. Stein and Rhys both looked away, obviously uncomfortable.

“Because Blackquill is a knockout baritone,” Klavier turned back to Simon, straightening. He
locked eye contact with the man, an eyebrow raising on his forehead. “And he promised his friend he’d give it a shot before he completely backed out—right, Herr Samurai?”

Simon’s glare intensified, and Klavier absently began singing a German-translated Irish drinking song in his head. It had always been his defense against Kristoph; if he could stay present just enough to know what was going on, yet distracted enough to not really pay attention, he could weather any storm.

_Oh, mother, don’t wake me, don’t jostle or shake me, I spent all night drinking with the ladies by the shore…_

When he saw that Klavier wasn’t relenting, Simon moved to open the door, and Klavier mirrored him.

_“Come on,” Klavier hissed. “One shot. Or talk to me. You get to pick one.”_

Simon all but glowered at him, and if the premises had allowed his katana, Klavier was positive he would have threatened him with it.

_“And if I never wake, don’t cry and don’t shake, just sing the glorious tales of my last night in Baltimore…”_  
Simon pursed his lips, his nostrils flared. Klavier could see him start to relent, if he could only keep it going a _little_ longer…

_“I can’t,” Simon all but breathed, and Klavier felt the air leave his lungs in a _whoosh.__

_“You don’t have to be _here_ when you sing. You don’t even have to turn around.” Klavier whispered back, nodding to the others. “They don’t think you can do it. _Show them_ they’re wrong.”_

_“I—,”_

_“Close your eyes,” Klavier kept his voice hushed, raising an eyebrow. He leaned in, his arms still folded over his chest. “Pretend you’re alone.”_ Reluctantly, Simon shook his head, but he closed his eyes anyway. “Remember being in your office, just you and Taka.” Klavier continued, locking eyes with Jack. He glanced down at the man’s guitar before regaining eye contact and nodding slightly. Jack took a deep breath, but started picking at the notes one more time. Klavier shot him a grin before he turned back to Simon. “Now prove it to them,” he said, eight counts before Simon’s entrance. Simon pursed his lips, his eyes screwing shut tighter. His cue passed, but Klavier turned to Jack and made a circular motion with his pointer finger, a silent motion to loop around. “No one _has_ to know what you’re singing about,” he tried again. “And no one is going to think lesser of you for it.” Simon took a deeper breath, and the strained wrinkles from his frown finally faded away. He opened his mouth.

_And he _sang._

Suddenly, as if the last few months hadn’t happened, Klavier felt an overwhelming sense of pride wash over him. He finally relaxed, a grin on his face again. From the corner of his eye, he could see Jack stumble over his own part, and Stein next to him slammed his hands down on the keys, creating a jarring thunk of mismatched tones. Simon jumped, and Klavier gave the man a look. Stein held his hands up and mouthed a silent ‘I’m sorry’, but since Jack didn’t stop, neither did Simon.

He hadn’t been lying when he said he knew his parts. He kept singing as if no one was in the room, just the way Klavier had first heard him. _I’ve been looking for this for months_, he thought. _All I had to bring up was his infuriating bird?_
Eventually, Simon stopped, and Jack slowly followed, letting the last few notes hang in the air until they faded away. Eventually the reverb silenced, and Simon opened his eyes to fix Klavier with another look. Klavier smirked.

A high-pitched whine came over the PA system in the room, and everyone inside jumped.

“You son of a bitch,” Dee’s voice came over the system, “You could do that this whole time?”

Klavier’s smirk turned into a full-blown grin and he turned back to Simon. Simon’s cheeks flushed, and Klavier stepped away from him, looking at everyone else in the room.

“That’s why I’m not singing,” he said, as if it were obvious. He began moving back to his guitar. Betsy, seemingly satisfied, sat back in her chair. It was Rhys, this time, that gave him a skeptical look.

“So, what, he’s gonna sing from offstage?”

Klavier looked again to Simon, who still hadn’t turned back around.

“Not exactly…” Klavier mused, remembering the footage from a few of Simon’s trials. He felt the grin return. “I have a few better ideas.”

Then, as if reading his mind, Simon turned his head over his shoulder.

Chapter End Notes

Simon Blackquill's sprites are among some of my favorite sprites. Lookin at you, Spirit of Justice...
Edgeworth sneezed, not for the first time that day. The home was quiet, save for the TV in front of him and the figure huddled into his side on the couch. He was warm, not uncomfortably so, but enough that, when he kicked off his slippers, the cold air outside felt like icicles against the sweat that had accumulated there. He crossed his ankles, one over the other, and glanced up from the computer on his lap to the TV. The weight on his shoulder shifted, and he turned to see Phoenix Wright gradually waking. The man’s nose was red from sniffling and blowing it so many times, and his eyes were puffy as he rubbed against the bleariness still attached to his sleep.

Despite his husband’s sickness, he was…cute. Edgeworth would never say it aloud, but it was true. Phoenix’s fever had gone down during the day, however, he still looked like he was overheating. He’d almost made Edgeworth overheat, that was for sure.

“Feeling any better?” Edgeworth asked as Phoenix stretched, his arms over his head. He shrugged.

“Not really,” he said, deflating. He turned back to his husband and let out a sheepish laugh. “I drooled on you.”

“I noticed,” Edgeworth turned back to his laptop. He’d felt the damp pool grow on his shoulder whilst Phoenix slept, but he’d elected to ignore it as much as possible. “Thank you for that.”

“Sorry,” he leaned over and planted a kiss on Edgeworth’s temple. It was hot, like his own. Trucy had come home with a nasty bug a few days before, and in their care for her, they’d contracted the fever. She’d insisted she was doing better, however, and had returned to school, leaving her dads to suffer through their illness together. He rested his chin on Edgeworth’s shoulder and looked down at
the laptop. “You’re still working?”

“Our Prosecutor’s Office isn’t going to shut down because I have a little fever,” Edgeworth said absently. “Unlike your office, I don’t get to choose when we take cases.”

“Hey now,” Phoenix muttered. “Athena’s taking care of it. She’s grown up a lot over the past year, you know.”

“I agree,” Edgeworth nodded, “and I’m sure she’s doing a fine job; however, I still need to monitor the reports that come in today and assign the right prosecutors to the job.”

Phoenix sighed. “Sounds boring.”

“It’s satisfying,” Edgeworth corrected. He continued to work in silence as Phoenix removed his chin from his shoulder and elected to put his forehead on it, instead. Despite the man’s insistence that he still felt like he was being microwaved, his fever did feel like it was abating. Edgeworth’s had broken in the morning, and he figured he’d be back to work the next day. Phoenix had turned sick almost half a day after him. Hopefully it breaks soon, Edgeworth thought.

“Why is there so much red?” Phoenix’s voice came from his shoulder. He was peeking.

“You know that reading over my shoulder is cheating, right?” Edgeworth chided.

“It’s colors, I’m not reading,” Phoenix sounded petulant, but turned his head away nonetheless. “I thought the Chief Prosecutor didn’t have to take as many cases.”

“He wouldn’t,” Edgeworth nodded, “if his two best prosecutors were emotionally intact.”

Phoenix grew quiet at that, and Edgeworth felt like he knew what he was thinking. After Apollo had left for Khur’ain, he and Athena had taken a few months to adjust their schedules and work with each other as two business partners, not three. As much as Phoenix had wanted Apollo to stay around, in the end, they all knew it was best for the man to have left.

“Right,” he said quietly. “How is it going without them?”

Finally, Edgeworth’s fingers stopped clicking on the keys. “Well enough,” he shrugged. “It’s better that they take care of themselves. Gavin was already out of the running for so long we’d adjusted to that, however, Blackquill had taken so many cases that we’re still reeling.”

“I see,” Phoenix sat back up. “Do you think you’ll be all right without him?”

“Of course,” Edgeworth gave Phoenix a look. “If we wouldn’t be, I wouldn’t have told him to go.”

Phoenix shrugged. “Fair enough.” He let Edgeworth work in silence for a moment before he reached over and felt at the man’s forehead. “You’re feeling better?”

“Yes,” Edgeworth nodded, grabbing a cell on his computer and turning it red. Phoenix nodded, sitting still for a moment before he began whistling. Edgeworth fixed him with a glance and he bit his lips together. His phone, thankfully, went off, and he turned to it.

A moment later, he was back at Edgeworth’s shoulder, trying to peek at the screen. Edgeworth quickly folded the laptop shut and turned to him. “Can I help you?” He asked, trying not to let the annoyance saturate his voice.

“I’m hungry?” Phoenix gave him a sweet smile. An eyebrow rose on Edgeworth’s forehead.
“You know where the kitchen is,” he nodded, but leaned forward and placed the laptop on the coffee table. A cup of tea, now cold, sat there, and he stared at it for a moment, silently lamenting his lapse in memory. Next to him, Phoenix stood, wobbling a little on his feet before he started on his way to the kitchen. With a sigh, Edgeworth followed, cold tea in hand.

“We should probably start on dinner,” Phoenix said, holding the refrigerator door open. “Any ideas?”

“None whatsoever,” Edgeworth said as he dumped out the mug. “Delivery?” Almost immediately after the suggestion, a weight was behind him, wrapping hot arms around his middle and pressing a stubbly kiss to his cheek.

“I love it when you talk dirty like that,” Phoenix grinned into his partner’s neck. Edgeworth laughed, leaning back into the embrace. “If I didn’t feel like there were tissues rammed into my brain, I’d whisk you away to get married again.”

“Make sure to pick somewhere that has soup, then,” Edgeworth wiggled himself around to face Phoenix. “Are you going to get your phone, or should I?”

“I got it,” Phoenix said, and Edgeworth watched him disappear into the other room. He grinned to himself and returned to the dishes. He’d rinsed two plates when he heard Phoenix from the living room. “Wait, what?”

“Wright?” He turned his head toward their island, which separated the kitchen from the living room. “Are you okay?”

A moment later, Phoenix was at the island, phone in hand. “I can’t tell if this is the fever or if it’s real,” he said, staring at his phone. A pit formed in Edgeworth’s stomach, and he dropped the plate in his hand.

“Is it Trucy?” He asked quietly, feeling his heartbeat in his ears. Immediately, Phoenix’s head shot up and he fixed Edgeworth with an incredulous look.

“What? No, sorry,” he shook his head, and Edgeworth felt a weight lift off of his shoulders.

“Don’t scare me like that,” he breathed as Phoenix turned the phone to him. When he looked back up, he was staring at a headline on the screen.

Ex-Gavinner Shreds: Klavier Gavin Hits the Stage Again with Metal Angst…and It Doesn’t Suck

Edgeworth’s eyebrows rose on his forehead, and he turned from the phone to the man holding it. “That’s a passive aggressive headline,” he noted, taking the phone in his own hands. “I take it this means they’re doing well?” He scrolled down a little to see the picture attached to the headline, a group photo of, what Edgeworth assumed, was their band.

Klavier stood off center, but proud, with arms crossed over his chest and hair styled in a gravity-defying updo. He’d added a few more tattoos to his arm since the last time Miles had seen him, almost nine months prior. Unsure how to feel about that, Edgeworth continued to examine the others lined up with him. There was a tall blonde woman at his left, and a tall man with long blonde hair next to her. To Klavier’s right was a redhead man faced sideways, with a black-haired man acting as their end cap. Edgeworth took them in with less than a second glance; his eyes landed instead on the figure behind the initial row, half between Klavier and half between the redhead. The man, facing away from the camera, stood with a wide stance, arms at his sides, and face turned down and to the side. Blinking, Edgeworth stared at the bushy black ponytail sticking out from his head and
hawk resting on his shoulder.

“You okay, Miles?” Phoenix asked from across the island, and Miles looked up. He blinked in surprise before handing the phone back. “You were grinning like a Cheshire Cat.”

“It’s nothing,” he waved it off. “What time is your nonsensical entertainment news on?”

“Nonsensical?” Phoenix asked, though he looked at the clock anyway. “Five minutes?”

“Go turn it on,” Miles turned back to the counter, refilling his tea kettle and setting it on the stove.

“You seem like you’re in a good mood,” Phoenix observed, but turned to the living room.

“I foresaw something like this coming,” Miles said over his shoulder, picking the tea leaves he wanted. “I didn’t expect Gavin to actually recruit Blackquill into his band.”

“Wait, that’s Blackquill?” Phoenix called over the commercials that came from the TV. “In a band? And you saw this coming?”

“Yes,” Miles turned back to the counter and leaned on it, looking out to see Phoenix sitting backwards on the couch to watch for him.

“And you didn’t tell me anything about it?”

“I assume Ms. Cykes also knew about it,” he pointed out, “you could go ask her the same thing.”

“I don’t live with Athena,” Phoenix rolled his eyes. “A metal band? Really?”

“So it seems,” Edgeworth shrugged. “Klavier came to the prosecutor’s office to try and recruit Blackquill. I didn’t care for the music, but the lyrics were quite good.” Before he turned to attend to the whistling kettle, Miles saw Wright turn in his seat and stare at him with an open-mouthed gawk. He allowed himself a self-satisfied grin at the reaction, but continued working on his tea nonetheless.

“I’m sorry, you listened to metal?” Phoenix called over the hosts’ greeting. “And you didn’t tell me about it?”

“It was hardly that groundbreaking,” Edgeworth shushed him as he moved back into the living room, teacup in hand. “It was mostly a demo track with Gavin singing on the PA.” He sat down next to Wright, crossing one leg over the other. On the screen, the hosts had just moved on from a story about an unfaithful actor. The B-roll showed a video of Klavier Gavin, seven years younger, singing on a stage with Daryan Crescend. Before Phoenix could open his mouth, Miles shushed him and nodded to the TV.

“—seems that he’s left his pop punk era behind, instead choosing to spearhead a new metal project.”

The video turned, then, to a shaky, pixelated recording of an underground venue. Bodies moved around in the screen, but it was held high enough over the crowd that Miles could make out the people on the stage. The camera quality was abysmal, but Edgeworth had seen Klavier Gavin enough times in his life to know when he was staring at the sixteen-bit version of him.

“This video was taken three days ago by a dedicated fan and turned in to E! News. Sources claim that the rumors about an alleged comeback have dominated the post-Gavinners scene, but is this what fans wanted? E! asked the man himself, Klavier Gavin, for a comment.”
The screen flipped to a generic, almost power-point looking background. A small headshot of Gavin pre-haircut popped up in the corner, under the heading ‘Klavier Gavin Speaks on New Band’.

“It just felt like it was time for a change, ja?” Klavier’s voice was distorted, the recording obviously taken from a phone call. The amount of time that had passed between the call and the present, however, seemed undeterminable. “The pop punk scene was—is—great, don’t get me wrong. It’s just not the Klavier Gavin that exists anymore. Am I worried we’ll lose fans over this? Nein, Fraulein Journalist. I’m more confident that people would rather hear the real deal than a canned version of happiness.”

“Ominous words from the former Gavinner,” the anchor cut back in. “E! pressed for more knowledge on the nature of the band, but Gavin declined comment. Looks like if we want any more information, we’ll have to just wait and see.”

San Francisco

“More information?” Klavier asked the reporter as he stood in the green room. “What more information could you want? I did the law thing for a while, then I came back to music. Is there something I’m missing?”

Simon listened from where he sat, positioned away from the door so no one would see his face.

“What made you leave the courtroom again?” She came prepared. Simon could appreciate that, at least. “Last time it was the Gramarye trial; what prompted this move?”

He could almost hear Klavier’s eyes rolling in their sockets. “It’s not that deep,” Klavier lied through his teeth. “When the muse calls, I answer. That’s how our relationship works. Kind of like an inspirational booty call.”

“So you are involved with someone again?”

“Nein!” Klavier’s response caused Rhys to turn next to Simon, and he grinned as he resumed his pre-show warm ups. He leaned in to Simon with the same grin on his face.

“Frontmen, right?” He nodded over his shoulder, and Simon shrugged. He turned his head only slightly for his response. Dee had been adamant with her orders to him before the band actually started performing.

“Now listen to me, Simon,” she’d stuck her finger into his chest. “If this is gonna work, you’ve gotta always be on guard. No one, and I mean no one, can see your face. Not reporters, not any fans... you gotta keep a low profile. All the time.”

Which, in Simon’s opinion, was exactly what he’d wanted in the first place. So far, the only truly angering part of it were times like now, when reporters came to the green room prior to a show in the hopes of wheedling out some new information from Gavin.

“Better him than us,” Simon muttered back. “I know he complains about it, but the man was made
Rhys grinned, and Simon returned to the current task at hand, brushing out his hair. That had been another stipulation from Dee; he couldn’t go onstage without brushing out the mane, which, per her instruction, he’d let grow even longer. *If they’re gonna only see the back of your head, she’d continued, might as well give them something to look at.*

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*Las Vegas*

“And, uh, how many times have you done this?” Stein asked from the other side of the dressing room over his shoulder, rearranging his hair for a third time. Simon stared at his own mirror, the incandescent lightbulbs casting odd shadows around the room. He and Stein had been left alone to primp and get ready while the others posed for pictures in the television studio. He fingered the fabric under his chin.

“Exactly zero.”

“And how are you not nervous?”

A grin pulled Simon’s lips to the side, and he turned over his shoulder at the man. “I spent seven years in prison,” he answered. “How hard can a stupid television interview be?”

“Right,” Stein muttered, straightening out his sleeves again. “Prison.” He fixed Simon with a look. “You didn’t, uh,—.” Simon turned sharply over his shoulder, and the man cut off with an ‘eep’.

“Right, right. Of course not.” And then, under his breath, he murmured, “Stupid.”

Simon returned his look back to the mirror. Klavier, Betsy, Jack, and Rhys had been called out of their own dressing rooms ten minutes earlier. Stein hadn’t quite gotten over his nerves enough to have joined them, and Simon…well. He pretended in front of the others for Dee’s sake, but it was a sorry attempt to save whatever face he’d lost in the first few practices. He placed his hands palm-down on the counter in front of him to quell another round of white-hot nerves streaking through his body. *Pull it together, he chastised himself. You’ve faced down interrogators without breaking a sweat, what are a few puffs asking after your love life?*

A knock came at the door, and he froze. Luckily, the person on the other side had taken their orders seriously, and only called through the door.

“Thirty seconds!” The voice was hardly muffled through the thin piece of particle board, and Simon turned to Stein, who took another deep breath.

“Easy, there,” Simon clapped his hand on the man’s shoulder. “It could be worse.”

“Yeah?”

“Yeah,” Simon pulled the face mask over his nose. Another idea from Dee. They’d only been so successful keeping Simon out of the spotlight, but for all their work, the news station had given them an ultimatum:

Bring the singer, or the interview is scrapped.
So, face mask it was. When Klavier had seen it, he had only grinned, nodded, and whispered the words ‘Herr Samurai’ to Dee.

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**Seattle**

“So, Klavier calls you ‘Herr Samurai,’” the woman said, though her pronunciation of ‘Herr’ sounded more like ‘hair’. Simon shoved his hands into the pockets of his hoodie, which made for a poor defense against the cold. He’d grown accustomed to wearing the face mask at all times, and had been lucky enough to pull it on before the reporter had stormed him on his way to the tour bus, asking for questions. He stared daggers at the bus. The woman seemed to be unfazed by the cold, but to Simon, it soaked through his hoodie and into his core. *Does it always have to rain here?* “Any comment on that?”

“It’s a nickname,” he responded. Why the universe had denied him psychic abilities, he wasn’t sure, but he kept his eyes locked on the vehicle. The woman looked up at him, as if expecting him to elaborate. After a moment, Simon looked down at her, waiting for the next question.

“*Herr Samurai!*” Klavier’s voice came from behind them, and Simon turned to see the man leaving the venue with arm upraised. It was all but impossible to notice the woman perk up at his arrival. “Come on, you’re gonna miss the bus!”

Simon took a hand out of the pocket of his hoodie and jabbed his thumb at the journalist. “She wanted to know why you call me Herr Samurai.”

After a few more steps, Klavier joined them, leaning heavily on Simon. Simon furrowed his brow but held him up anyway, trying to ignore the stench of alcohol emanating from the man.

“Why do I call you Herr Samurai?” He turned his face back up at Simon. “Because it’s your name. Obviously. Can we go now?”

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**Denver**

“*Can we go now?*” Simon hissed, leaning over so Klavier would hear. Klavier turned to him, brow furrowed.

“What, you don’t like the attention?”

“Frontmen are supposed to have the attention,” he muttered. “I didn’t sign up for this.”

“No one does,” Klavier grinned, turning to him. “But you spend so much of your time hiding and being mysterious that I can’t really blame anyone for wanting more info out of you.”

Simon wrinkled his nose, partly because of Klavier’s response, and partly because he could smell the champagne on Gavin’s breath. “It’s not even noon yet,” he hissed, and Klavier rolled his eyes.

“Don’t tell me you didn’t have a single thing to drink before coming here,” when Simon kept staring
at him, Klavier sighed, straightening as the anchors came back into the room. “Like I could deal with these people sober.”

“Mr. Gavin,” the male anchor for the morning news held out his hand to introduce himself.

Phoenix

“Bitte, Fraulein, how many times do I have to ask you to call me Klavier?”

The hostess tried to hide the blush that came to her face. Luckily for her, the makeup she’d donned in her dressing room minimized the reaction. In the wings, Simon scoffed. Dee, standing next to him, shook her head.

“Same Klav, different day,” she grinned, glancing up at Simon before turning back to the set. “You’ll get used to him.”

“It’s obnoxious,” Jack muttered on the other side of her, and she turned to him.

“Obnoxious or not, it gets people listening.”

“To his old stuff, maybe,” he crossed his arms over his chest. “If he could cut the crap and get them to listen to our stuff, then maybe it’d be okay.”

“Excuse me,” Dee turned to him. “Have you not seen how the album sales are doing? They’re paying for your new clothes there, Mr. Maeger.”

Jack rolled his eyes. “He’s a typical frontman. I don’t know why everyone wipes his ass for him.”

Before Dee could respond, the hostess introduced the rest of the band, and Simon, Jack, Betsy, Rhys, and Stein were ushered to the little stand of bleachers on which Klavier was already sitting. Dee frowned again at Jack as he passed her, dutifully taking his place next to Simon, and behind Klavier. She felt the phone in her hand buzzing and looked down. Another call from a bigger band, most likely asking if Gavin’s new project would open for them. She nodded to one of the producers and turned away, holding the phone to her ear.

“Dee Richter,” she answered when she was out of range of the microphones.

Albuquerque

“A tour?” Simon asked, feet dipped into the hotel’s hot tub. He sat with his jeans rolled up to his knees, Klavier and Betsy relaxing in the hot water.

“You say that like you’ve never been on one,” Betsy noted from where she sat, stirring her margarita with her straw. Simon looked at her.

“I haven’t.”
“What do you think we’ve been doing this whole time?” Klavier asked, righting his head from where it had been thrown back in order to finish the drink in his hand. He waggled a finger at the server that passed behind Simon, pointing to his empty glass. “I hate to break it to you, Herr Samurai, but we’ve been on tour this whole time.”

“A west coast tour,” Simon grouched from behind his face mask. His nose turned up as he watched the server scoop up the empty cup. He realized that he hadn’t been counting Gavin’s drinks again, and cursed to himself. “This one…”

“This’ll take us to Canada, ja,” Klavier nodded. “You aren’t nervous, are you?”

“Of course not,” Simon snapped, but bit his lips together. “I just wonder how Taka is doing.”

This got Betsy’s attention. “Taka?”

“Ach, his bird. I’m sure he’s doing just fine.”

The server returned and set down the replacement drink. Klavier fixed her with a grin, at which she blushed, and he took a pull on his drink.

“Ohh, that’s it’s name,” she nodded. “Didn’t you get a sitter?”

Los Angeles

“Athena, did you see the interview?” Trucy asked from the other room, and Athena ducked around the bird’s next peck to peek into the room in which she sat. The Wright Anything Agency wasn’t giant, no, but it did make an all right Taka-sitting space. It didn’t...really matter that the bird was mostly her priority, now, not when she thought about it, but there was little she wouldn’t have given if Simon would come back for it.

“Which one? I starting to lose track.”

“They’re going on tour!” Trucy poked her head around the corner, holding up her phone. Athena blinked at the phone, barely reading the headline ‘Shreds Insider: Klavier Gavin’s New Project Makes Waves, Lands US Tour’ before her own phone started buzzing in her pocket. “This is so cool!” She continued, turning away as Athena looked to her phone. As if he’d acquired psychic abilities, Simon’s contact was staring at her, a picture of the two of them at the latest Beyonce concert. She grinned to herself; Simon had insisted that he wasn’t excited to go, but she’d caught the selfie before he could wipe the slight smile from his face. She swiped the green button to answer, and held the phone to her ear.

“Congrats on the tour!” She greeted, sandwiching the phone between her ear and shoulder.

“Thanks,” Simon muttered. “Listen. I’ll be home for a few days. How is Taka?”

As always, his phone conversations were quick and to the point. Athena couldn’t really fault him for that; seven years with monitored phone calls would do that to a man.

“Taka is fine,” Athena lightly rubbed her finger on the hawk’s forehead. “When will you be home?”

“In ten minutes or so. I’ll be over to pick him up then.”
“Ten minutes?” Athena yelped. “You’ve got to be kidding me!”

Silence on the other side of the phone. She cleared her throat.

“I mean! Nothing! Yeah, come over any time. I’ll get him ready to go.”

“Thank you, Cykes-dono.”

Athena opened her mouth as if to return the goodbye, but the line cut off before she could get it out. She stared at the phone for a moment before finally looking up at Taka, dressed up in a tuxedo made for birds. She placed her hands on her hips.

“All right, boy, we’ve gotta get you ready to go see Simon.”

Winnipeg

Having a bird on the tour bus was, honestly, a first for Klavier Gavin. Which, in and of itself, was an oddity, considering that Klavier had previously thought he was all out of ‘firsts’. As he sat back in his seat, arms crossed over themselves, he let the sounds of Taka grooming himself and the swaying of the bus to lull him into a half-sleep.

Sharing a bus with the band had been a calculated risk on their first big tour, but it was one Klavier couldn’t pass up. It was more than just a good thought at this point; it was tradition. If he knew people like he thought he did, then the bus rides would be enough to bring them together better than glue. Even now, he could hear Jack and Rhys debating the difference between lagers and pilsners in the back. Betsy slept in the aisle in front of him, and Simon mirrored her position near the front of the bus. Stein, the pianist, slept half-seated on the two seats he’d started out on, back propped up against the window and feet up on the other seat. Dee slept like she was in the Gatewater, mask over her eyes and pillows nestled around her scarfed head. With a slight smile on his face, Klavier let his eyes fall closed.

Suddenly, Klavier was back in his teens, getting ready to leave for the recording studio. He’d said goodbye to Kristoph only seconds ago, but on his way out, his brother had caught him by the arm, and for a moment, they stared at each other, Kristoph’s face an unguarded picture of rage for half a second before he schooled it back into the same picturesque look of indifference.

“Don’t be late again,” he’d muttered before tossing Klavier’s arm to the side again and returning to the laptop open on the counter.

Klavier jerked awake, both legs lifting off the seat for a moment in the movement. Reflexively, he brought his right arm into his chest, holding it there with his left as if it’d been burnt simply by the memory.

Don’t be late again.

The words echoed in his mind like it was a bell. He shook his head, trying to bring himself back to the present. Immediately, he felt dizzy, his hands pulsed with each heartbeat, and he felt like he was…slowing down.

Dammit, he thought to himself, turning to the back pocket of the seat in front of him. His fingers
brushed against the smooth metal of the flask inside. He pulled it out with one swift motion, taking a peek over the seats before quietly twisting it open. The motion swished the liquid inside a little, and to Klavier’s dismay, it felt much lighter than he remembered. With a frown, he downed it anyway. *A few of those three months ago would have gotten you drunk,* he heard a part of himself think.

He forced the thought down as soon as it came to the surface. Yes, a few flasks six months ago would have been more than enough to make him think twice about driving, but now…

Now that was the bare minimum to get through the *day.*

He grit his teeth at the thought, and stuffed the container back in its pocket. If Dee decided to turn around now, he could only imagine the headache that would follow. Sure, he’d probably gotten a little out of hand lately, but it was a *tour.* What were tours for, if not to play music and get drunk? He was only doing his part to save the scene. On top of that, it kept him *moving.*

And moving is what he really needed. The tour, recording, traveling, interviews…Dee had him moving constantly. Whether it was fulfilling some sort of private function appearance for a music school, writing a verse or two for an artist, or meeting with producers, Klavier couldn’t remember the last night he’d had to himself. Sure, the alcohol was a depressant, but it also made his inhibitions disappear. And Klavier Gavin without his inhibitions didn’t mind the constant movement. In fact, he welcomed it. Left alone, without the lights, sounds, and buffers, the thoughts he’d tried so hard to banish to the back of his brain could run free.

*I can’t be that wretch right now,* he thought, *not with the band.*

He glanced to Simon, asleep on the floor, a pillow under his head and lanky arms stretched outward. Taka slept perched on the seat above his head, one leg tucked up into his feathers.

*Besides, if it becomes a problem, I’ll stop.*

As he thought it, he tried to ignore the voice in his mind piecing together how to get to his duffel without waking the man on the floor.

Salt Lake City

“Don’t stay up all night again,” Rhys muttered from the seat in front of Jack as he reached up and twisted off his light.

“Yeah, yeah,” Jack waved him off, tucking the deck of cards back into its box and tapping it closed.

“I’m serious, man,” the red hair poking over the seat disappeared. “You’re going to burn the candle at both ends if this keeps up.” Jack didn’t say anything in return; instead, he bit his lips together to keep the snide remark that came to mind safely away. “We don’t need *another* liability with this band.”

*Another* liability. Jack couldn’t help the smile that came to his face to hear it come from someone else in the band. He didn’t have to ask what Rhys meant by it, and let the redhead rest. Stifling a yawn, Jack sat back in his own seat, resting his back against the windows and lifting his feet onto the makeshift bench. His phone came out easily from its pocket, and he unlocked it to see his Twitter feed abuzz with notifications. With a self-satisfied grin, he swiped over to his profile to check the
follower count. It had grown exponentially in the last few months. If there was one thing he had to hand to Klavier Gavin, the man knew how to promote and run a band. Perhaps it had something to do with the royalties he was surely receiving from the Gavinners, but at the moment, it didn’t bother him. At the moment, he was satisfied to sit back and catch up on what he’d missed during the show.

Being the opener for a major rock band had its ups and downs, surely, but the biggest downside had to be the bus. There was little he wouldn’t have given in that moment to sleep in a real hotel bed. His back hurt the longer he tried staying upright, and his eyes burned from staring from his phone. It had been weeks since the last time they’d stayed anywhere for longer than a day, but if burnout Klavier Gavin could keep up, so could he.

A quick peek over the seats to where the man in question still had his light on only spurred Jack to scroll quicker through the feed. When he came to the latest Gavin tweet (a slang of German words that roughly translated to ‘Bus sweet bus’) from three hours prior, Jack’s eyes rolled around in his head before he clicked on the man’s profile.

Like most celebrities, Gavin used his twitter like it was a diary. Jack did his best not to compare their follower counts, instead scrolling immediately past the header and to the content for which he was looking. Every time they did a new interview, Klavier would retweet it the morning after. The one from yesterday, in Denver again, was nestled safely four pages down. The comment from Gavin was a quick thank you to the news station that had thrown the interview together, and as he read it, the video began to autoplay. As he looked down at it, he felt his skin prickle. He’d grown accustomed to wearing his headphones all the time now, and reached down to place one into his ear before he enlarged the video.

The news anchor’s voice filled his ear as soon as he did so, and he listened to her explanation of Gavin’s run with his old band and his stint in the courtroom. Pictures of Gavin scrolled by on the screen, and he felt his nose turn up at the view. Gavin, Gavin, Gavin, he thought, glancing back up to see that the man’s blond head had appeared above his seat, and he was reaching over to show Dee something. They always start with him.

It wasn’t as if Jack had expected anything different; Gavin was the ex-star already, and he’d been quite the wave-maker in the courtroom back in LA, but hearing the same story all day every day… well…

He looked back down to see footage from their show, and the audio switched from the woman’s voice to the song. The song was one of Gavin’s, a stripped-down, bass heavy intermediary tune that Blackquill sang. They’d purposefully placed it on the last half of their set, so Simon could take a break and relax. From what Jack understood, Blackquill had never sang in front of anyone before Gavin had found him. For as talented as he was, the special treatment was a bit much, in his opinion, but he couldn’t deny that as time went on, the man’s voice became stronger and stronger.

That being said, doesn’t mean he can make it through a set yet, he thought, the memory of what Gavin had said to Blackquill echoing in his head.

“They have to keep up with me, but we’ll do anything for you.”

With a sneer, Jack watched the footage from their set. Stripped down as the song was, the white lights Dee had demanded for it strobed on and off, making everyone look like they were glitching through the song. Gavin and Blackquill, seated on two stools, were the only ones that didn’t move, yet the station had decided to use them for most of their footage. Gavin sat facing the audience, his guitar racked, and singing the tenor harmonies with a grin on his face. Blackquill’s stool was positioned right behind him, and the camera had only taken a few shots from the side, so Simon
would be silhouetted against the lights. At first, Jack had hated the light show, but now, as he watched it, he had to admit that their manager at least knew what she was talking about.

“*He’s a good friend—a talented friend—and I respect his privacy,*” Gavin’s voice came over the interview, and Jack blinked back to the screen to see the man sitting across from the anchor, lounging in a director’s chair. He was halfway through a shrug, the phoenix tattooed on his left arm rising and falling. “*You should have seen him when I first asked if he would join the band, I thought he was going to rip my head off!*” The two shared a laugh before the anchor pressed him for more information. “*I have zero doubts that he’ll eventually show his face, but for right now, it’s assez mystérieux, is it not?*”

Jack’s eyes rolled back into his head at the gratuitous French the fop had to throw in. The anchor cleared her throat with a blush, and Gavin’s grin grew wider. The screen came back to a shot of Blackquill’s silhouette, and before he subjected himself to further Gavin embarrassment, Jack ripped his headphones out and let his head fall back against the window.

“*They have to keep up with me, but we’ll do anything for you.*”

A spark of white rage rose in his gut at the memory, and he closed out of the application before he had to see any more of Blackquill’s face. From further up in the bus, Jack heard the rustling of feathers and shuddered.

*Anything, huh?* Jack thought, and slid down in his seat. *Try me, Gavin.*

Chapter End Notes

I saw a Klapollo Fanfic Bingo chart on tumblr, and one of the corners was background narumitsu. It came on my feed right after I finished the first scene, and then I realized...the only thing I’m missing from this is Apollo himself.

............He's on his way, I promise.

As always, let me know what you think! Feedback really keeps this train going.
Blood

Chapter Summary

And all that I regret, I have before and will again
It's over now (Are you running away?)
I come apart (As I light the way)
It's in my blood (Let the sky fall down)
I won't let go (My oblivion)

Chapter Notes

Hey hey hey! Nearing the halfway point, and I couldn't be more excited to keep the train moving. I did some heavy revamping of this/next chapter halfway through, tossed around the idea of merging the two together, and...well...figured this one was long enough. That...and I really just want to update XD Again, working on the Ace Attorney script for Acen took up a lot of my time, but now that it's in the final stages, I'm really hoping to get back to working on this regularly. I might even look at my Jojo's fic for the first time in a year. Who knows. I know it gets said a lot, but comments/kudos really do help out a lot on this!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

“He’s late again,” Jack muttered, tapping his foot impatiently on the studio’s stool. Their tour finished, they’d traveled to Oregon to churn out another album. At the moment, Stein was recording his parts to try and cover for Gavin and Blackquill, who were running late—as per usual. It wasn’t a big deal, he knew. At this point, the revenue from the band was enough that, paired with Gavin’s usual contributions, the studio time cost them nothing. If Gavin was late, it was only costing himself more money.

That didn’t mean it wasn’t annoying, however.

“Are you really surprised?” Betsy asked from where she lounged on the couch across from him. Rhys sat next to her, deep in thought over one of his phone games. “The guy’s not exactly punctual, Jack.”

“Which is kind of ridiculous, if you think about it,” Rhys piped up. “Wasn’t he an attorney?”

“Something like that,” Jack muttered, sitting back in his chair. “I’m more surprised about Blackquill, honestly.”

“Maybe Gavin actually got him to go party. Guy needs to let off some steam.”

“You’re telling me,” Betsy muttered with a chuckle, and Jack turned to her with a raised eyebrow. “Oh please. You don’t think he isn’t wound tighter than a guitar string, don’t you?”

Jack fixed her with a look. “At least he’s not a liability to the band.” Yet.
Rhys jabbed a finger at him. “You know, that vendetta you’ve got against Gavin’s only gonna get worse the longer you hold onto it.”

“Oh, shut up. Like you don’t think he’s out of control.”

“I absolutely think he’s out of control,” Rhys conceded. “But you? It’s deeper than that, man. It’s been like that since day one.”

Jack pursed his lips together and sat back himself. “So what? It’s not like I’m gonna do anything about it.”

“I think you should,” Betsy said, and Jack turned to her. “Talk to the guy. He’s not so bad once you get him talking.”

“You mean once you get him sober,” Rhys corrected, and she shrugged.

“He’s not that bad once he’s drunk, in my opinion. Once he realizes you’re not an adoring fan, it’s not so bad.”

“That’s my point!” Jack sat up straighter. “We’ve been together for a while now, and he’s still treating us like we’re his adoring fans. It’s not a band; a band is a team, right? If we were a team, it’d be different.”

“This coming from the guy that literally said team sports were a waste of time?” Rhys raised an eyebrow at him, and Jack threw his hands in the air, exasperated.

“I’m just saying. Yeah, Gavin’s good for the money, but that’s about where it ends.” He felt his frown deepen. “His voice is mediocre at best, and he’s an okay guitarist. If it weren’t for the Gavinners fame, we’d be going nowhere fast.”

Silence followed, and he looked up to see the two staring at him, both with varied levels of incredulousness.

“What?”

“Yeah, that’s the way I’d describe the only Grammy-award winning member of this band; mediocre,” Betsy snorted.

“How would you describe it, then?”

“Different?” She sat up. “One-of-a-kind? You know…something nice, not something extremely passive aggressive?”

“Yeah, because ‘different’ isn’t Midwestern for ‘bad’,” Jack rolled his eyes.

“I’m just saying,” she held up her hands in surrender. “Look anywhere you want, you won’t find someone who sounds like him.”

“Yeah, you’ll find people better,” Jack muttered. “Without Blackquill’s voice and Gavin’s money, we’d be nobodies.”

“Well, at least you like someone’s voice that’s not your own,” Rhys shrugged, and turned back to his phone.

“What’s that supposed to mean?”
“I’m just saying, man; most of this gig is the attitude, and I can’t help but feel that you’d have a better time if you just cheered up a little bit.”

Jack’s mouth dropped, and when he turned to Betsy, she just shrugged. “He’s got a point,” she said, and he pushed himself to his feet, taking a few frustrated steps to the side of the waiting room. He could hear Stein over the loudspeakers, the synthesizer pounding along to the bass and drum beat that Rhys and Betsy had already recorded. He stuffed his hands deep in his pockets, digging the fingernails on his right hand into the skin.

*It’s just an attitude thing?* He thought bitterly to himself with a scoff. *And I need to change my attitude? I’m not the drunk of the group!*

Superficially, the band was doing well, he knew. One record out, another on the way, and already they were placing on the metal charts...It was ridiculous. Yeah, it felt great, but just *knowing* that they’d be nowhere without Gavin’s notoriety...

It ate at him. Sure, he’d wanted something like this for years, so the anger he felt toward Gavin felt peevish, but he’d always wanted to get there on his own. Now…?

The interviews were about Gavin. The album was about Gavin. The reviews were about Gavin.

*Gavin, Gavin, Gavin…*

*And Blackquill?*

Well, he seemed overwhelmed with everything, but Jack couldn’t really…fault him for it. From his understanding, Blackquill had been towed along like the rest of them, a pawn in Gavin’s reach for further fame.

“They have to keep up with me, but we’ll do anything for you.”

*But he’s complicit in it all, isn’t he?* Jack sighed. *It's not like he's trying to make Gavin better, or anything. Him or Dee. They just...let him do whatever he wants. He’s a spoiled brat.*

“All I’m saying is that I can play the guitar, too,” Jack said finally. “It’s not like Gavin’s the only one in the world who knows how to play Dragonforce, and it wouldn’t kill him to share the spotlight.”

Silence. Suddenly aware that the music had stopped over the PA system, Jack turned on his heel to see Betsy and Rhys staring at him, both with puzzled expressions.

“What?” He asked, raising an eyebrow.

“Dude, that conversation ended like…three minutes ago. You sure you’re okay?”

Flustered, he crossed his arms over his chest and pursed his lips together. “Fine.”

Betsy shot him a disbelieving look, but returned to her conversation with Rhys. Pursing his lips together, he turned his attention back outside to see Gavin and Blackquill playing rock paper scissors in the parking lot. His nose turned up at the sight, and he whirled around away from the window. Betsy and Rhys’ voices abruptly stopped, but he didn’t look up to see them staring at him.

“I’m going to run through my parts again,” he offered as an explanation, shoving his hands into his pockets and storming past the two. He was only feet away from the door when he heard Gavin and Blackquill bickering down the hallway. Frowning to himself, Jack shoved his hands deeper into his pockets and hunched over.
“Any other day, I could do this, Jack thought as they drew nearer. But not today.”

“Jack!” Gavin’s voice came from in front of him, and he cringed. Reluctantly, Jack looked up to see the two, Gavin with one arm up in the air in a wave. He wore a dark green tank top with an old, ripped pair of jeans. “Guten Nachmittag!”

With a scoff, Jack raised his chin in a silent greeting. “Recording started in die morgen, you know.”

That caught Gavin off guard, and he lowered his arm. Jack allowed himself a self-satisfactory grin at that, and let his shoulders relax.

“Eleven is hardly the morning,” Gavin brushed it off without so much of a regretful glance. “Besides, Betsy was slated for 11. How is that going?”

Jack stared at him for a moment before he sighed. “Betsy and Rhys are done, and Stein’s almost there. I’m running through a few things before I’m up.”

“Ach! Then we are right on time!” Gavin grinned. “We’ve been warming Herr Samurai up.”

Raising an eyebrow, Jack turned to Simon, who’d yet to say anything. He just stood, silent as always, with his hands in his pockets and hawk on his shoulder. His eyes, dark and shaded by his hair, pierced into Jack’s head as if they could see straight into his soul. He couldn’t help but cringe back at the sight.

The guy was weird. He turned back to Gavin, who had an expectant look on his face, as if he’d just asked a question.

“Oh…what? Sorry,” Jack shook his head, trying to ignore the way Simon’s head slightly cocked to the side at his sudden change in demeanor. Gavin crossed his arms over his chest and grinned.

“I asked if you would like to join us in the green room so we can talk about a few things with everyone else about the show tonight,” Gavin repeated, flashing a big, camera-worthy smile.

Something turned in Jack’s stomach. “I’m fine,” he muttered. “Not all of us can show up late and expect to be perfect.”

With that, he pushed past the two, knocking shoulders with Blackquill as he passed. The bigger man hardly moved, but Jack had to take a step back in order to gain his bearings again.

“‘I’m worried,” Klavier yelled across the hall to Blackquill later that night. Their opening band had just finished their set, and while the crowd waited for them, they grew louder. Simon raised an eyebrow at him, and Klavier knew that, where he not wearing the face mask, his mouth would be screwed up to the side as part of the eyebrow raise.

“I didn’t know you were capable of that,” he responded, and Klavier gave him a half-laugh. As his head bobbed, his hair wobbled. The updo had to last through at least the first part of the set. If it sagged too much, he’d go and dunk his head in water in order to start over, but if he could get it to last through Blackquill’s intermission, he’d be happy enough.

“I’m serious,” he said again, taking a look around to make sure that no one was watching. The rest
of the band would be around shortly; they’d agreed take an interview before the show, and luckily, the reporter hadn’t demanded either of them stay. “Something’s wrong with Jack.”

“Something’s been wrong with Jack since he signed on with us,” Simon said. “He’s extremely jealous of you, fop-dono.”

“What?” Klavier was taken aback. “You can’t be serious.”

Simon deadpanned at him, crossing his arms over his chest and leaning back against the wall behind him. “I can’t be serious, are you blind? If you grew out your hair, dyed it black, and stopped getting those infernal spray tans, you two could be related.”

“I think you’re stretching it.”

“I’m not,” Simon shook his head. “Who here has the degree in psychology?”

Klavier rolled his eyes. “How long are you going to ride that?”

“It took me a long time to get it, so just as long,” Simon’s eyes crinkled in that infuriating grin, and Klavier rolled his eyes again.

“Anyway, do you think he’s going to be an issue?”

“Who, Jack?”

“Duh.”

Simon sighed, his shoulders rising and falling with the motion. He took a moment to ponder, a moment Klavier had accustomed himself to over the last months of friendship with the man. Blackquill, not unlike Herr Edgeworth, didn’t waste any words. When either spoke, they had a point to make, and that was that. His eyes would squint and relax as he thought, and when he was finally ready to speak, he pushed himself away from the wall.

“I think that if he gets more spotlight it’ll be less of a problem,” Simon finally uncrossed his arms and stuffed his hands into the back pockets of his jeans. The baggy tank top on him read ‘I’m a Barbie Girl’, and as much as Klavier hated it for his image, he also knew that Simon would flourish if he was given at least a little room to rebel. “But it might not be a bad idea to start looking for a new guitarist once this album is finished.”

Klavier sighed, turning to one of the gophers as he returned with his guitar and a cocktail. He grinned and took both, looking behind him to see the rest of their band making their way down the hall. With a wink at the gopher, Klavier turned back to Simon, already drinking the pink mess in his hand. Simon was frowning at him, a look Klavier only knew because his eyebrows were visible from underneath his bangs when they were that involved in the expression.

“Was?” He asked, downing the rest of the drink. “It helps me loosen up. Maybe if you drank a little before every show, you’d be able to actually face the crowd.”

Simon rolled his eyes at him. “You know how I feel about it.”

Right, right. Klavier set down the glass and coughed into his fist before flashing a grin at the approaching band members.

“How did it go?” He asked, raising his voice as the lights outside grew darker and the crowd louder.
“I don’t see why people get so excited to do those,” Betsy, who had shed her outer layer in preparation for the hot lights, piped up. “I think they’re a little overrated.”

Klavier grinned. “You’re one in a million, Betsy.”

The stagehand above him waved at him to move. Klavier obliged the man, taking the stairs in twos to the stage. He could hear everyone following behind him, and when he reached his amplifier, he was pleased to find another beer waiting for him, as he’d requested. He took a mighty swig of it before he plugged his guitar in and turned to face the crowd, slipping back into the comfortable facade of Klavier Gavin, rockstar.

If there were one thing he had to give their new audience, it was that they knew how to scream. He and Simon had been working on getting the man to scream, but as Klavier hopped on and off the platforms at the front of the stage and listened to the crowd, he only knew that Simon had a long way to go. Simon dutifully sang beside Betsy, his powerful voice booming through the monitors at Klavier, who, for the beginning set, only had to jump on a microphone to provide harmonies when needed. Simon’s progress from his first practice to the present was amazing, but he still had a long way to go until he was ready to perform.

Until then, Klavier would fill in for the crowd. He didn’t really mind; it almost came to him as naturally as he remembered it, and it was fun to let out all his pent up energy on stage. There, under the hot lights, amid the pounding drums and cacophony of the band, his breath came easier, his shoulders relaxed, and he could smile again. It wasn’t like he was forcing it, either; when he was on the stage, it was no longer the smile he put on to assuage others, but the electrifying grin on someone who couldn’t contain themselves.

As he held out the last note for as long as the ProMod would allow, he remembered the word—no, the emotion he’d been craving for years.

It was joy.

With a grin, Klavier turned to see Simon leaving the stage. As much as Simon’s voice moved a crowd, Klavier knew he grew overwhelmed easily, and he’d asked if it were possible for him to take a break. After a few hours of rearranging their setlist, Dee had agreed that the second act would be the perfect spot; besides, part of Blackquill’s agreement to sign on was that Klavier would sing as well. They’d just put all his songs in the middle, something about which Klavier wasn’t going to complain. When the lights came back up and Stein hit his first notes, the crowd still screamed, the band kept playing, and for Klavier Gavin, the world kept turning.

Unlike Simon, Klavier had no problem singing some of the songs he wrote himself. His songs, personal though they were, made him feel…alive.

He stepped up to the microphone and started singing. A part of him yelled with delight as he realized someone close to the front of the stage was singing along, and he focused in on them. Their mouth moved at the same time his did, and in a gesture of gratitude, Klavier winked at them. He tried to ignore the pride that welled in him when they only sang along with more vigor, instead choosing to focus again on the words coming from his mouth.

It was a good song. He’d written it about Kristoph—as seemed the pattern with most of his new
material—but he’d softened the words and accusations enough to make it general for those listening. As the song wound down, he moved away from the microphone and ducked his head through the neck strap of his guitar. A stage hand was there in a moment to take the guitar for retuning, and Klavier returned to the microphone in time for Betsy to hit the bass drum as his introduction. Klavier sidled to the microphone for the close, intimate intro, scanning the people in the crowd for a group that needed to be entertained. His eyes landed on a group in the back left, and as she hit the snare into the verse, Klavier ripped the microphone from the stand and burst into action.

As he moved across the stage, taking moments to jam with those on stage and those in the crowd, he found himself scanning the crowd. For whom, he wasn’t certain, he had to keep pulling his eyes away from different parts of the audience to continue with the song. A stab of frustration hit him the third time he had to remind himself to keep moving; he hadn’t had to do this since he was a child, singing with the Gavinner's for the first big tour. Foolishly, he’d kept thinking that Kristoph would show up. Why, or how, he hadn’t been certain, but a part of him had always wished for that strand of approval from Kristoph.

A face caught his attention in the crowd, and Klavier stopped moving entirely, staring at it. It was... almost familiar. He blinked, his mouth moving by muscle memory, staring at the figure. They weren’t extremely tall; in fact, he had to climb up onto the platform in order to see them more clearly, and even then, he had to squint. Brown hair, brown eyes...could it be...?

The attendee turned their head, and the odd haircut—which Klavier had almost recognized—revealed itself to be a mohawk. He shook himself; for a moment, he would have bet his life that the fan had been Apollo Justice.

Anger, whether it was anger at Kristoph, Apollo, or himself, he wasn’t sure, boiled in his stomach, and he forced himself to look away, pumping his fist in the air at the last snare hits.

“How’s everyone doing tonight?” Klavier yelled into the darkness as Jack started chugging on the first few chords. The crowd cheered in response, and he hopped off the platform and back onto the stage. He turned to see Rhys finish retuning his bass, stomping on the tuning pedal and back to his amplifier. With a grin, Klavier lifted the microphone back to his mouth to buy the man a few more seconds. “We’re so happy to be here with you tonight, as you know we’re back in the studio to make another album—,” another round of cheers. Klavier let them die down before he continued, “—which includes this next song here. Thank you so much for coming out tonight, we are—!”

Before he could finish his thought, the ear-splitting screech of feedback pierced through his plugged ears, and he held the microphone away, pressing his free hand to his ear on the corresponding side. His earplugs, expensive—and quite functional—though they were, did little to get rid of the searing noise that hit his head like a lightning bolt. The crowd gasped at the sudden noise, as well, and Klavier turned on his heel only to see Jack straighten from turning up his amplifier, the sound of feedback whining into the pull of strings on a guitar. As the general murmurings of the crowd died down, Klavier watched as Jack began soloing where he stood, facing away from the audience and eyes intent on the guitar neck. It cut through the dead silence; Betsy, Rhys, and Stein shared looks much like his own.

His first reaction was anger. Not a calm, simmering anger; no, Klavier Gavin felt the closest he’d been to rage since Kristoph had refused him prior to his execution. It boiled in him. Made him feel like he was alive more than the alcohol could. In that moment, he felt like he could have stalked over and socked Jack in the face. His knuckles turned white in their grip of the microphone, and he shoved the anger aside. He turned to Rhys and Betsy and nodded for her to play along. She fixed him with a quick ‘if you say so’ look before tapping the hi hat together in rhythm with his solo.
After a moment, she began to drum along in earnest, and Klavier took the moment to move to the side of the stage and take his guitar from the stagehand, freshly tuned and ready for him.

“Danke,” he winked at the man, turning back to the stage and striding back toward his microphone. To her credit, Betsy covered the outburst expertly; she even began slowing him down, as if she were trying to guide him to an ending.

_Betsy, you have my eternal thanks_, Klavier thought as he faced the crowd again, affixing the microphone in its stand. He gestured to the side of the stage. Luckily, the crowd was back into the moment. He knew fully that they weren’t out of the clear yet. The moment of silence from everyone on stage wouldn’t be easily covered, but…

“Jack Maeger, everyone!” He yelled into the microphone.

Like most other things his life, he could at least try to cover it.

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“Das war eine Katastrophe!” Klavier all but roared as he stormed off the stage and into the green room, heart thrumming in his chest. He took a moment to gingerly set down his guitar before turning to the rest of the band. Betsy, Rhys, Stein, and Blackquill passed without a word, but as Jack moved into the room, Klavier stepped into his path, ripping out his earplugs. Jack, taken aback, almost stumbled right into him.

“Can I help you?” He snapped, and Klavier crossed his arms over his chest.

“I should be asking you that question!” Klavier felt a familiar pounding in the front of his head. He shoved at it, trying to put it off just a little longer. “What was that?” With a huff, Jack rolled his eyes and ducked his shoulder to push past Klavier. He stood, baffled, for a moment, his chest sore where he’d been shoved. _Did he just…?_

Irritation flared in Klavier’s chest, and he followed, taking a few long strides to try and catch up. “Jack! Wait up!” He caught up with Jack just as he was pushing past the rest of the band toward the dressing room, and Klavier had to duck under Simon’s arm to keep up. “Warten Sie Mal! You can’t walk away from this!”

“Watch me,” Jack called over his shoulder, and in a burst of frustration, Klavier threw himself in front of him just before he could reach the dressing room. He didn’t much care for his back virtually against the wall, but it was enough to the guitarist to stop.

“Then let me rephrase,” Klavier glared at him. “You don’t _get_ to walk away from this.”

Rolling his eyes, Jack set his hands on his hips and pursed his lips. “What do you want me to say?”

“I would like an explanation, at the _very_ least!” Klavier said as though it were obvious.

“I have nothing to explain to you.”

The words hit Klavier like a slap in the face, adding to the pounding coming from inside. He licked his lips. When was the last time he’d had water?

“Really,” he raised an eyebrow. “So what happened out there…?”
“I don’t know what you’re talking about.”

There was so much apathy in the man’s posture that Klavier had to dig his nails into his biceps to keep from wringing his neck.

“Really? Forty-five minutes ago it sounded like you had plenty you wanted to talk about.”

Silence. Jack’s nostrils flared, and he took a deep breath opposite Klavier. He could hear the rest of the band catch up with them, but in that moment, Klavier could only stare at the man. His head pounded, his chest felt tight, and he had to remind himself to stop pressing so hard on his arm before he broke tattooed skin, but he would not let this man ruin everything he’d poured into the band. He could hear high heels clicking down the hallway—a sure sign Dee was on her way—and he forced himself to lower his voice.

“Jack, if something is bothering you, Bitte, tell me. We can work something out.”

There was an unmistakable downturn to Jack’s nose as he regarded the words, and Klavier forced down another outburst. It felt like his brain was ready to burst out of his forehead.

“Like I said earlier, I have nothing to say to you.”

Biting his lips together, Klavier had to suck in a hissing breath to keep his temper down. When he turned back to Jack, he could see Dee out of the corner of his eye. Though his instincts screamed at him to hit the wall behind him, to lash out, to act like a teenager in the hallway, he settled for sticking a finger in the man’s face.

“Don’t make it an issue, then,” he growled. “You’ve been acting like a child ever since you joined the band, and I’m sick of it. Tonight did nothing but prove that you need to grow up. And don’t say I never asked for your input.”

Before Jack could say anything in return, Klavier pushed past him, digging his shoulder into Jack’s chest as he moved.

“What happened? Klav? Klav!” Dee’s voice came from behind him, but he continued forward. He shoved his hands into his pockets only to find his earplugs there. With a frustrated growl, he yanked them out of his pocket and chucked them to the ground.

“Klavier!” Betsy, this time, called after him, but Klavier pushed himself to walk faster, his boots clunking down the hallway as he went. Slowly, the thrumming in his head matched itself to his footsteps.

“Let him go,” a deeper voice said next. Simon. Klavier stuffed his hands into his pockets for real, shouldering out through the back exit and into the night.

He didn’t register that it was raining until he was three blocks away, when his tank top started sticking to his skin and his hair flopped back down into his face. Frustrated, he pushed it away as he passed a storefront. As he moved, he stopped, catching his own reflection.

He stood like that for a moment, head pounding, hands holding his hair on top of his head. He was breathing hard against hot, angry tears and an anxiety attack, but as he stared, it seemed to subside if only for a moment. As he stared, even the raindrops seemed to fall a little slower, and the beating in his head slowed.

“You’ve been acting like a child ever since you started this foolish band, and I’m sick of it,” he heard in his head. “Your attitude proves that you need to grow up.”
As he stared, his face slowly morphed into Kris’s face. His skin paled, his chin and nose grew longer, and his eyes grew older. Though he held his hair away from his face, his mind instinctually overlaid Kristoph’s over his own. His breath caught in his throat. He took a deep breath, trying to banish it, but the longer he stood, the harder it became.

*Go away, dammit!* He thought. He bit his lips together so hard he could feel blood. He’d been seeing Kristoph’s face over his own for *years* every morning, but no matter what he tried in the moment, the face wouldn’t budge. The pounding in his head seemed to spell out the truth from which he’d been running for half of his life:

He could change his hair. He could change his style.

He couldn’t change what Kristoph had made him.

“You need to grow the hell up, Klavier.”

The world crashed back into motion. He doubled over, his headache suddenly unbearable.

“Grow the hell up!”

The words echoed in his mind, over and over again, and he dug his fingers into his scalp.

“Stop it,” he plead to the sidewalk, “stop it, stop it, stop it…”

He forced himself to stand, trying to get his bearings. He turned away from the window before he ended up shattering the glass. His vision blurred, and he could just make out the neon sign flicking on and off across the street. Hardly looking for cars, he ambled across the back road, grateful for the late hour. The sound of a car honking its horn pierced into his head and he flinched away from it, but stopped in the street and stared at the headlights. For a moment, he pictured that he could see the driver behind the blinding lights. The image from the show, of Apollo staring up at him from the crowd, came back. His breath caught in his throat, as if he could see Apollo behind the wheel. Surely…surely if it were him, he’d get out of the car, right…?

He stared for a moment, silently daring the driver to run him over, or open their door. At least then he’d have closure of *some sort*. When the horn honked again, he raised a hand in a silent apology and continued on his way. He came to a stop in front of the bar. His throat and mouth were still dry, and Kristoph’s voice still whispered into his ear.

In that moment, Klavier hated himself more than he had in a very, very long time.

He pushed open the door and entered the warm atmosphere.

**Chapter End Notes**

Tomorrow’s the day Phoenix Wright loses his badge (April 19, 2019), so that means that tonight (April 18, 2019) is the day that Kristoph tells Klavier how to ruin his career. I thought it was only fitting to post a chapter like this tonight.
You Should Have Killed Me When You Had the Chance

Chapter Summary

So I say goodbye to a town that has ears and eyes  
I can hear you whispering as I walk by.  
Familiar faces smiling back at me,  
Yet I know this would make them change.  
The only thing that's going to bother me is that you'll all call yourselves my friends  
Why can't you look me in the eyes one last time?

Chapter Notes

I've been waiting to write this part for a year now, let me know what you think of it!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

The sedan came to a rolling stop, waking Klavier from his midmorning nap. He blinked bleary eyes against the unforgiving sun. Frowning, he held his hand to his head, pinching the bridge of his nose between thumb and forefinger. Muffled sounds came from the front of the car, and as he pushed himself up, they slowly faded into sense.

“Hey! You okay back there?” The woman said, and Klavier blinked at her. “Listen, I’ve got another passenger to pick up. You’re going to have to get out.”

Still half asleep, Klavier’s frown deepened, and he turned back to look at the hotel. Why did Dee get us such a loud place?

“Verzeihung,” he muttered. It took him three times to find the handle before he pulled on it, and all but stumbled out onto the asphalt. His stomach rolled as he stood straight, and he coughed into his fist to try and calm it. I’m not that drunk, he thought to himself, reaching into his back pocket for the hotel key Dee had given him. I just…need to…lay down. Sleep it off. I’ll be fine.

Suddenly grateful he’d thrown a big enough fit that they’d all gotten separate rooms, he ambled to the automatic doors, fumbling through his wallet for the room key the whole way. Hopefully he’d written the room number on the key…right?

“Mister Gavin?” A high-pitched voice came from his right, and he turned to see the receptionist staring at him, his hands stopped on the computer in front of him. At last Klavier freed the key card and frowned at it. Of course he hadn’t written the number on the key. “Mister Gavin—!”

“Can you…can you tell me th’room I’m in?” He asked, really wishing he’d brought his sunglasses. If he thought the sun were bad, the fluorescent lights were worse. He squinted at the man against the bright lights.

“Uh…excuse me?”
“The room,” he said, being careful to annunciate every word. If the receptionist thought he was drunk, he’d tell Dee, and then Dee would tell Simon, and the last thing Klavier wanted was an exasperated lecture at the moment. “In which I’m s’posed to sleep.”

“Oh, it’s…”

At that moment, Klavier caught a glimpse of black and white hair rushing past him. He started, turning on his heel to try and follow the figure—which was much shorter than he remembered Blackquill—

When he turned, however, the space behind him was empty. He stared for a moment, blinking.

*I’m not that drunk, am I?* He thought, turning to the receptionist as if to ask.

“Gavin!” A familiar voice came from behind him, and Klavier whirled around again on his heel. Pointedly ignoring the way his stomach turned again, he blinked to see Simon Blackquill standing a few feet behind him, samurai hoodie haphazardly pulled up over his nose and—Winnie the Pooh pajama bottoms on his legs. Klavier stared at them for a moment before he gestured to the space behind himself, where he’d thought Blackquill had just been.

“Herr Samurai, you were—just—but—,” he took a pause between every stammer to look behind himself, where indeed no one stood. When he turned to Simon again, he took a deep, calming breath. “You were *just here*!”

Unamused, Simon raised an eyebrow and crossed his arms over his chest.

…Perhaps I’m still a little more drunk than initially thought.

“Where the hell have you been?” Blackquill took a step forward, and Klavier waved his hands in the air as he moved past him, as if he were trying to clear the air of the man’s negative energy. “Gavin!”

*Das is nicht wichtig,* he stopped at the end of the hallway, looking both ways to try and remember where Dee had roomed him. “What *is* important s’tat I need…a nap.”

“It’s seven in the morning.”

Klavier turned to him. “A nap, Herr Samurai.”

“Gavin, you—!”

“And how many times d’l have to tell you to call me Klavier?” He picked a vaguely familiar direction, and, to his delight, Simon followed him without protest. He stumbled a little as he walked down the hallway, the floor traitorously shifting as he moved. “In fact, didn’ I say something yesterday…”

“Yesterday?” Simon grabbed him as he held up his key to start trying to enter a room. Klavier let himself be dragged down three more doors to one he’d already passed before trying again.

“Ja,” Klavier turned to squint up at him. “We talked yesterday, and you called me Gavin—,”

“That was *three days ago,*” Simon said sternly, and Klavier’s hand froze right before he swiped the card. It…*what?* “Fop-dono, you’ve been MIA for two whole days.”

Klavier blinked at the key sensor at the words, trying to fit them into some sort of sense. *That…can’t be right.*
“Dee’s contacted the police. For fuck’s sake, we thought you’d drowned or something.”

“I…” he bit his lips together. How long was I…?

He remembered the bar, after the fight with Jack. He’d met a few people, gotten invited to a party…there’d been a cute brunette there, one with some drugs…he’d just partied for one night, hadn’t he?

No, he thought. There was that party, then when you woke up it was just night again, so you thought it was still the same night. Well, then after that had been another party with the same people, but then they’d relocated…and he’d…he’d…

“Nonsense,” he said. The missing part of his memory ate at the inside of his head. “I…”

“Shit, are you still drunk?” Simon asked, and Klavier shook his head vehemently. Don’t think about it. Don’t think about it. The taller man bent down, his gray eyes searching. Klavier kept staring pointedly at the lock. “Klavier, this isn’t—,”

Klavier? Not Gavin? Not fop-dono?

He turned to Simon, whose mouth kept moving under the mask, but Klavier had stopped listening. He’d never heard Simon use his full name. He blinked at Simon, trying to follow the words coming out of his mouth, but to little avail.

“I…” he stammered again when Simon stopped talking. His heart started pounding in his chest, and he licked his lips. I’m so tired, he thought. Blackquill, please…stop making me think…

Luckily, he had a solution for times exactly like this.

“I must have missed a lot,” he said, a forced cheer to his voice. Simon blinked at him, obviously not expecting the sudden change of pace. Klavier forced a grin to his face and unlocked his door, leaning on the handle and pushing it open as soon as it beeped its assent. “Anything fun happen while I was out?”

“Gavin—,” Simon, still floored by the change of subject, blinked after the man. Had he really not heard a single word of what he’d just said…?

“Ach!” Gavin threw up his hands, and Simon stepped into the doorway after him. “You may only enter if you promise to call me Klav or ‘fop-dono’.”

“I—,” Simon frowned, shoving his hands into the kangaroo pocket of his hoodie. “Did you hear anything I just said?”

A deep sigh from within. “I suppose not addressing me works, too. How was recording? Are we any further?”

Frustrated, Simon took a step inside, eyeing the room. He did his best not to show his overt disgust as he did so, but…

The room felt like a nightmare. Or a high school psychology professor’s wet dream. One of the two. He couldn’t decide.

Clothes were strewn across the floor, leaving a small—but distinct—path for him to tread. A glance into the bathroom left him with images in his head of a covered mirror, half-filled bottles next to the bathtub, and a haphazardly-hidden garbage can. He stopped in the bathroom doorway as he
recognized a few opened band-aid wrappers, blinking as the blood drained entirely from his face.

Feeling much like a wooden doll, he turned from the bathroom to the rest of the hotel. Dee hadn’t messed around when she’d booked them a hotel for an extended stay; each of their rooms was more like a little apartment in downtown Los Angeles, and Gavin’s was entirely covered in papers, tab sheets, alcohol bottles, and what looked like the remnants of a few benders. In the middle of the tornado stood Gavin, who faced out the window with arms stretched over his head like nothing was wrong.

It twisted Simon’s gut.

“Well, I can’t say I’m surprised. After all, we’ve been here for two weeks. A long two weeks.” Klavier’s voice was soft and a little apologetic.

“Don’t be such a prude. It’s not a big deal.” Simon felt his nostrils flare in frustration.

“In fact,” Klavier continued in a sharper tone. “Everything is better than fine. I haven’t felt this great in such a long time.”

Silence. Simon felt his mouth drop as if he were going to say something further, but it got lost in the back of his throat. Cross his arms tightly over his chest, Klavier pursed his lips tightly and turned back to stare out the window. Simon felt his stomach twist inside, trying to reconcile itself from the obvious contradiction. He opened his mouth and shut it a few times, trying to come up with something that wouldn’t just set the other man off more.

“Please,” Klavier continued, much softer this time, “I need some rest.”
“...I—,”

“Bitte,” he cut him off. “It is very hard to hold up this conversation if we aren’t talking shop.”

Simon snapped his mouth shut his eyes moving to Klavier’s calloused fingers digging into his arm. Pursing his lips into a tight line, Simon felt his hands ball into fists at his sides. He let the initial temper flare subside, closing his eyes and taking in a deep breath. He turned, his foot clinking into an empty bottle of wine on the floor. He took a few steps before turning on his heel. He looked over his shoulder at Klavier, who hadn’t moved.

“I can’t help you if you’re not going to talk to me,” he said quietly, and Klavier took in a deep breath, squaring his shoulders. Immediately, Simon’s breath left him in a whoosh.

“I don’t need help,” he said, almost a whisper. “I need...I need rest.”

It took a moment for the words to register in Simon’s mind, and he stared at the silhouette of the younger Gavin brother, blinking hard against the memories that threatened to wash over him.

“Please leave, Herr Samurai,” he added, tightly crossing his arms over his chest and turning away.

“I assure you, murderer, I don’t need help. I’ve just been sentenced to death. I need rest. Please, leave.”

Setting his jaw, Simon nodded, and walked out of Klavier’s room. The door slammed shut behind himself.

He was only a few rooms over, and luckily his long legs carried him there in a minute. He stopped short as Dee poked her head out of her own room.

“Simon?” She asked, her slippered feet starting their way out of the room. Upon seeing the man’s bare face, she felt her dreariness leave and she stood up straighter. “Simon! Your mask-!”

“Klavier is back,” Simon cut her off, fumbling in the pocket of his pajama pants for his room key. He’d meant to grab some breakfast, but with the way his stomach kept turning...

Dee stopped in her tracks, her eyes moving in the general direction of the fop’s room. “He is? When? Where has he been?”

“Ask him yourself,” Simon muttered, finally grabbing the card and pulling it out of his pocket. He held it up to the sensor for a moment before the light flashed green and the lock opened.

“How is he?” She asked, crossing her arms over her chest. Simon stopped, staring into his own room for a moment.

“He isn’t well,” Simon said curtly, stepping inside and shutting the door behind himself. It thunked shut as he leaned heavily on it, arms hanging limply at his sides.

“He isn’t well,” Loch said from across the table in the visitor’s room. Simon eyed the file in front of him with a bored expression, even though his curiosity burned inside of him.

Something to do.
Something to do.

Six years in prison had almost dulled his mind. He’d grown frustrated at reading Tom Sawyer again, and up until this morning, had considered the news that the prison had acquired The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn the best news he could have possibly received. His name was fourteenth on the waiting list, and as if to rub salt in the wound, the librarian had dropped off Tom Sawyer last night. No shipment, no notes, just...the damned book. Simon had taken it and skipped through the pages, begging his mind to forget the plot again so he could enjoy it, but the longer he stared at the printed letters, the more he hated Mark Twain.

He’d...changed in the past six years, he knew, but he’d be damned if he let himself feel anything in front of a few dumb prison guards. The file sat in front of him, waiting to be opened. He knew the look of that file.

A psychiatrist’s file.

His hands started buzzing where they were chained in front of himself, something that happened every time he felt excitement like this. He pursed his lips together, eyeing the two guards.

In prison, he’d learned to expect the simple life. He wasn’t about to start complaining about it. In little over two years, it wouldn’t matter anyway. In little over two years, his sentence would finally, finally be carried out, and the monotony would blessedly end.

“He’s a murder, how well can he be?” The other guard asked, and Simon eyed him with an unimpressed expression. The guard bit his lips together and bowed his head, taking a step away from the table. Loch continued as if nothing had happened.

“He’s...too composed. Usually guys that are sentenced to solitary death row...well, they kinda lose it after a few weeks.”

“And he hasn’t?”

Loch shook his head. “He seems actually...happy about it.”

The new guard shuddered. “Yikes,” he muttered under his breath. Simon flicked his eyes back up at him, and again, he shrunk back.

“So what do you want from me?”

“You’re a psychologist, aren’t you?”

Not moving his eyes from the new guard, Simon tapped one finger on the table. “I thought I was a murderer, Keye-dono.”

The color drained from the guard’s face as Loch rolled his eyes. “Just take a look at the file and tell us if you can talk to him.”

Simon reached both hands forward and took the file in his awkward, shackled grasp. “Talking won’t be the hard part,” he muttered, finally moving his eyes to the open picture of his patient staring perfectly composed back at him. Simon felt himself frown.

“When you say he’s happy to be on death row,” Simon looked up. “You don’t actually mean content, do you?”

“What’s the difference?” The guard by the door asked, checking his watch nervously. “Can we just
He was supposed to be in there five minutes ago.”

“Bobby’s right,” Loch sighed, pushing himself to his feet. “Hope you can walk and read at the same time.”

Simon, already half-absorbed in the file, reluctantly stood as well. “Lead the way, Keye-dono.”

Only minutes later, Simon snapped the file closed as Loch opened the first door to the solitary ward. Bobby crouched to undo the shackles around his feet while the second door was opened. Simon half expected the new kid to undo his wrists, as well, but Loch ushered the two through the second door and to the waiting area. Before the last door was opened, Bobby took the file from Simon’s hands and set a legal pad on top of the pages, along with an open ballpoint pen.

“Good luck,” he sighed, and Simon fixed him with a quizzical look as Loch opened the last door into…

Into a stunningly pristine cell.

They’d let this one decorate however he wished, it seemed. Book shelves, rugs, a side table with some nail polish on it…Simon felt the envy burn in his chest. Were those…law books? His palms itched just at the thought of legal work again. Sitting in an armchair—an armchair, when was the last time he’d sat on something more plush than his bed?—was a man in a periwinkle suit, white shoes still clean and hair twisted into a long curl at the side. The man glanced over his wire-frame glasses before he shut the book.

“And here I thought solitary confinement meant I wouldn’t see anyone except the guards,” he mused, a curious eyebrow rising as he eyed Simon.

“Mandatory psyche evaluation,” Loch explained, eyeing Simon. “You have an hour.” The door shut behind Simon, and he suppressed the urge to take a deep breath in.

“I suppose they couldn’t find anyone who wanted to come down to this dungeon,” the man set the book aside, and Simon had to physically tell himself not to leer after it. Instead, he forced himself to watch the man in front of him.

Kristoph Gavin.

“And you are?” He asked, measuring up Simon.

“A murderer, same as you,” Simon said. A test. One of Kristoph’s eyebrows rose on his forehead, and he crossed his arms over his chest.

“Well, I can assure you that I am not in need of a psychology evaluation,” he said.

“Of course,” Simon rolled his eyes. “Only crazy murderers need those.”

A tight smile came to Kristoph’s lips. “Are you calling me crazy?”

“I’m saying the guards think you need help. What do you think?”

Kristoph scoffed, shaking his head. “I assure you, murderer, I do not need help. I’ve just been sentenced to death. I just need rest.” He gestured to the door. “Please, leave.”

“You know I can’t do that,” Simon rattled the shackles on his wrists. “Trust me, I don’t want to be
Kristoph squinted. “Doubtful. The UR-1 incident was quite intriguing…Simon Blackquill.” Simon calmed the uproar of emotion that coursed through him when he thought of Metis—Athena—Aura—

Stop it, he thought sternly, confining his outer composition to a simple apathy. Impressed, Kristoph gestured for Simon to lean on the bookshelf. He took a seat, idly unscrewing the cap from the nail polish at his side, and Simon reluctantly moved to lean his shoulder on the stained maple.

“Well, since you’re stuck here as much as I…” He said, stretching out his fingers and beginning to smear polish on his pinkie, “What shall two murderers discuss?”

The door rattled in the threshold when Simon slammed his fist into it, gritting his teeth against the memory. Stop it, he thought as his fingernails bit into the heel of his hand. Just because he looks…and acts…and says the same things as Kristoph does not mean that he is his brother…he’s not.

An overwhelming sense of guilt racked his chest at even the thought of comparing the two Gavin brothers. The comparison had always eaten at the back of his mind, but in the long run, he’d always been able to separate the two.

This, though…

Simon pounded his fist into the door again, leaning his head against the wood. He and Dee had been absolutely worried sick about Klavier when he’d been missing, but this? For him to come back and blatantly deny that there was a problem—to not even know he’d been gone for so long—

Pursing his lips together, Simon pushed himself away from the door and stalked further into the room, kicking a discarded set of jeans on his way. He could feel his temper flare on and off as he processed more of what Gavin had said—or not said—in their brief talk. Clenching and unclenching his fists, he stared out the window at the people walking below.

Brief though his experience was with Kristoph Gavin, it had always eaten at him. The man had been an absolute nightmare in their meetings. Half the time, Simon hadn’t been able to tell if he’d been the one analyzing Kristoph, or if Kristoph had been the one analyzing him. He raked his fingers through his hair, trying to banish the memories of fighting with the man over a set of tea, all the while watching him paint his nails with the poisoned polish he kept at his side. Kristoph had offered it to Simon on occasion, and luckily, Simon had denied, however…

Once the Misham trial had ended, the elder Gavin brother had been…different. Their meetings had turned from genial pleasantries masking barbed comments to an all-out mental fight between the two. Kristoph’s threats and analytics became attacks against Simon, and the warden had upped their meetings from once a week to thrice a week.

It had been torture.

And the things he’d said about Klavier…?

Simon shuddered. He’d had a short few months with Kristoph Gavin. To grow up with the monster, to know him as a brother first and then a murderer….

It twisted Simon’s gut. He could see Klavier’s room in the back of his mind, the obvious signs of grief and depression speaking wonders when the man himself had clammed up. Even in the time
Klavier had taken away from the office, he’d yet to heal from anything that had happened over the last five years. Perhaps his entire life.

\textit{You should tell him why Kristoph refused to see him}, a part of Simon thought, and he crossed his arms over his chest. His heart ached at the thought. If he did, what would it do to Klavier? Part of him knew that it would provide some sort of closure, but…

If Klavier knew the man Kristoph had been leading up to his final days, Simon had a sinking feeling it would push him further over the edge. An edge, he knew, upon which Klavier was already precariously dangling.

\textit{He deserves to know}, the voice whispered to him again, and Simon grit his teeth together. \textit{Just tell him the truth. And if the truth hurts, it’s the truth hurting him, not you.} The voice was right; he’d already been enough of a coward leading up to the present; what good did he do himself or Gavin by hiding behind the truth?

\textit{If Gavin’s already leaning off the edge…this would make everything about the band stop}, he realized, the pit growing in his stomach falling to his feet. Never in a million years would he have thought that the idea of the group disbanding would cause him emotional distress, but as it were, he stood stock still in his hotel room, facing the emotion. He lost track of how long he stood that way, arms crossed over his chest and staring at the pedestrians outside his room.

The sound of his phone buzzing on the coffee table pulled him out of his thoughts, and he turned. The sun had shifted in the sky during his musings, and now he glared at the late morning shadows. They were slated to begin recording at 3 PM, and he’d planned to take a run before, just to clear his head. He moved away from the door to the coffee table, pulling his leg up behind himself to stretch out his quadriceps before trying to exercise. Leaning forward, he plucked the phone off the table and held it up.

And then immediately almost dropped it.

The phone, which had been open to he and Dee’s conversation the night before, unlocked to show a picture of him in the hallway between his own room and Gavin’s. A glance down to the caption Dee had sent with it let him read the words ‘EXPLAIN PLS????’ Frowning, he turned back to the photo, trying to figure out what was so wrong with it. The picture showed him essentially at his worst; the Winnie the Pooh pants he currently wore had been a gift he couldn’t bring himself to part with, and his face was pulled down in a frown. Nothing new. Maybe his hair needed a better brushing, but…

He blinked.

His face.

In his haste to leave Klavier, he’d forgotten about the stupid mask. The picture had been posted to twitter already, and Simon balked at the specs on the photo. It had already been retweeted near a thousand times. As he stared, another text came through, this time in the band’s group chat. He tapped on the notification to see a text from Rhys with the same screenshot.

\textit{Think this’ll make us trend?}

Groaning, Simon pressed a hand over his eyes and let out a long sigh. From the corner, Taka finished his grooming routine and perched on Simon’s shoulder, gently pecking at his fingers. He turned to his bird and scratched him between the eyes.
“Today just keeps getting better and better, doesn’t it, Taka?” He muttered, turning back to his phone.

Betsy was the first to respond.

*Those are the ugliest fucking pants I’ve ever seen, Blackquill. Please wear them for the festival this weekend.*

Dee’s reply came almost instantaneously.

*He most certainly will NOT wear the pants!!!*

“Well, damn,” Betsy’s voice came from Blackquill’s right as he stood backstage, fingering the mask on his face. The summer day was hot, and she wore a black muscle shirt with the sleeves ripped off, much like his own. He turned to look at the woman approaching him, and saw her staring at his legs with arms crossed over her chest.

“What?” He asked, and she gestured at his pants.

“No Winnie the Pooh?”

Simon rolled his eyes and turned back to the stage, feeling the sweat intensifying the itch of a new pimple growing underneath the mask. He hadn’t really been prepared for the skincare routine that came with covering his face; on a hot day, the skin under the mask would swelter, leaving him with a mess of acne under the fabric. As usual, he could feel butterflies in his stomach, but that wasn’t terribly uncomfortable anymore.

“Can’t blame a girl for hoping,” she muttered, taking a step up to him. “Have you two talked since he came back?”

Simon’s hand fell back to his side, and he felt Taka growing anxious on his shoulder.

“No,” Simon said. He and Klavier had yet to talk to each other. Part of him wished he could say it wasn’t due to lack of trying, but he knew better. If he’d really, truly wanted to speak with Klavier Gavin, he would have. They could have figured out something—anything to put their last conversation to bed. As it stood right now, however, he and Klavier had only put up with each other’s presences in mixed company, but their conversations had stayed as curt phrases.

The night before, he’d crossed the hallway as if to try and say something to the man, but as he’d raised his hand to knock on the door, he’d heard another voice in the room.

“I just don’t know if he’ll ever be ready, Dee,” Klavier had been saying, and Simon’s hand had stopped right before landing its first knock. “Right now, he feels more like a babysitter than an actual band member.”

At first, Simon’s hand had flown back up as if to pound on the door, but he’d stopped himself. Klavier’s words weren’t necessarily wrong…were they?

*I want to prove that I want to be here,* he thought, pursing his lips together. Leaning to the side, he caught a glimpse of the crowd. The butterflies in his stomach were still there, but the familiarity was almost…comforting, now.

“Think you’ll be okay today?” Betsy asked, and Simon straightened again. The band onstage
finished their last song, and the stagehands were flocking to tear down their set.

“I know we’ll be okay,” he set his shoulders. “He’s not petty.”

“Not very much, at least,” she grinned. “I’ll see you up there in ten.”

“Where are you going?” Simon turned after her as she started back down the stairs.

“I’m making sure everyone’s out of the toilet,” she called over her shoulder, leaving Simon alone.

“Porlaand!” Klavier shouted into the microphone as their second-to-last song ended. Jack’s guitar continued chugging as the crowd behind Simon screamed their approval. The interlude gave him enough time to lean down and take a drink of water. Out of the corner of his eye, he saw Betsy’s eyes on him, and he returned the look. Still pounding the kick drum, she shot him a winded grin. He wiped a trickle of sweat from his nose and nodded in return. The set list at his feet had two more songs on it, and he stared at the next one with dread.

The poem had been written at one of the most raw moments of his transition from prison to normal life. It bothered him that Klavier could churn out hit after hit without batting an eyelid, but as soon as Simon tried to sing a song that hinted at old memories…

“You get used to it,” Klavier had said while they were practicing. Simon had wanted this song to be perfect before finishing it.

Perfecting the song had also meant that he learn how to scream.

“You all have been such ein wunderbar crowd!” Klavier continued, and Simon pictured him moving to his microphone and readjusting the guitar around his shoulder. Betsy began her snare-cymbal rolls at the beginning of the song. “Our next song is the first single off our new album—,”—more screaming, a chuckle from Gavin—“and we’re so excited to play it for you—scream it out!”

The guitar suspended for a moment, reverberating around the stage just long enough for Betsy to hit the crash cymbal two times in beat before Klavier belted out his first line. As they’d practiced over and over again, Simon screamed his echoes to the lines as they came. He watched Betsy from the corner of his eye as she moved in rhythm with the song, and Simon did the same from where he stood. He removed the microphone during the chorus, keeping his eyes closed and taking a deep breath in preparation for the second verse.

When the music suspended again, Simon dug deep and started screaming his verse into the microphone. He and Klavier had been working on it for weeks, and when he heard himself over the monitors, Simon had to remind himself that it was him singing.

Well, screaming.

He was still getting used to hearing himself sing, but the screaming would take a little longer to get used to.

A wave of relief hit him when the sound of the crowd didn’t waver. In fact…they seemed to like it. A lot. Apparently many of them had listened to it, as well, because he could hear them singing along every once in a while.

It was exhilarating.
The last part of the song had been the closest Simon had come to actually writing about the UR-1 incident. It had started off as a form of artistic therapy to get it out of his system.

At the time, he’d figured no one would ever see it. Klavier Gavin had changed that.

He remembered the night in the prosecutor’s office, sitting at his desk after hours, debating whether or not he should call Gavin to demand his poem back. He remembered staring at the fop’s contact, and knowing deep down he’d never actually call.

Then, he remembered the guitar over the PA system, and Klavier Gavin breathing life into his words.

He’d changed some of the words around. Simon didn’t really mind that; it protected the emotions buried into the original poem and made it easier for their listeners to relate to his experiences. Instead of finding a woman ran through with a sword, the end of the song spoke of finding a dead body in a bathroom. They’d written most of it into gang vocals, which Dee had written out and given to the festival as part of their visual show. The first time the words were sung, Simon could only hear a few who had listened to the single enough before coming to the show singing along. The second time, the crowd grew more used to it, and Klavier continued his part.

Betsy turned to Simon as he screamed his last line before he started on the gang vocals. Lost in the song, he’d doubled over to scream. The coming words had echoed through his mind over and over while making the transition out of prison.

In the last three days, the spat with Klavier had only brought it back to the front of his mind. It had eaten away at him in every waking moment:

*You should have killed me when you had the chance.*

Betsy’s jaw dropped as Simon reached up and yanked the mask from his face, raising his fist in the air. Squeezing his eyes shut, he yelled it to the rafters.

*You should have killed me when you had the chance.*


The UR-1 incident had punched so many holes into so many lives. He’d done his best to live through it, but he still couldn’t help the ghosts that followed him around.

He’d lived through the UR-1 incident. He’d survived as best he could.

No one had prepared him to live with the UR-1 incident.

He wheeled around, lost in the moment, and stalked off his riser. As he pushed past Rhys, whose hands stilled on his bass, he yelled the words louder. The screaming from the audience grew louder.

*You should have killed me when you had the chance.*

Klavier needed an extra step to get up on the rafter, but for Simon it was an easy hop. He breezed by a stunned Klavier and bounded up onto the rafter screaming the words at the top of his lungs. He’d forgotten about the microphone, yelling along with the crowd with his free hand pumped into the air.

*You should have killed me when you had the chance.*
In that moment, his legs gave out, and he fell to his knees in front of the crowd, baring his soul to the sky above; he still screamed the words he’d kept inside for so long:

“You should have killed me when you had the chance!”

Chapter End Notes

Lil' baby Simon, breaking out of his shell.
Metalingus

Chapter Summary

I've been defeated and brought down
Dropped to my knees when hope ran out
The time has come to change my ways
On this day, I see clearly; everything has come to life
Bitter place, and a broken dream, and we'll leave it all, leave it all behind

Chapter Notes

Okay, so again, I redid some of the outline to make this flow a little better, which means that another chapter has been (re)added! This one and the next one might be a little shorter than usual, but it should help the rest of the flow into the next act.
Uh, without further ado then, welcome to act 2?

See the end of the chapter for more notes

The television hummed and crinkled softly in the early afternoon, static poking its way around the edges of its frame. The hot summer air was almost suffocating in the small room, a halo of haze hanging in the twilight. A broken air conditioning unit hung from the front window, haphazardly pulled out in order to try and ventilate the room better. It would have worked, too, were there any breeze of which to speak. The room inside was quiet and humid. Birds chirped and squawked outside. It would have been the only sound in the large room, save for the television.

The figure on the couch had meant to change the channel almost three hours ago, but had left the remote control in his kitchen, and after the exhausting day he’d had, had resigned himself to his fate of gossip shows. He’d been lucky enough to turn down the volume before sitting down, and his laptop had been within reach, so it could have been worse. He lounged in shorts and a tank top, arms folded behind his head in a makeshift pillow. Despite the heat, he took in a deep breath and relished the quiet.

“You aren’t falling asleep on me, are you?” A voice came from his open laptop.

He sighed.

The almost quiet.

“No, Clay,” Apollo Justice turned his attention back to his smaller screen. He felt bad, really he did; he and Clay rarely got to speak as it was, with his move to Khur’ain, but ever since his best friend had been assigned to the International Space Station…

Well, Apollo had quickly gotten used to seeing Clay Terran floating.

“It was just a long day,” he continued, readjusting so he wouldn’t be so close to a horizontal position. He hoped it would help him stay awake.
“How many clients are you down to?” Clay’s voice almost had a mocking tone, and Apollo groaned, covering his face.

“I don’t want to think about it,” he drawled, and Clay at least graced him with a sad laugh. As annoying as his friend could be sometimes, Apollo savored the laugh. The few days when he’d believed Clay to be dead had been some of the hardest in his life.

Eclipsed, of course, by the de-throning and overthrowing of the Ga’ran regime.

As he spoke with Clay in his renovated law offices, he couldn’t help but feel a tug at his heart. He’d always wanted to show Clay Khur’ain, and he had before Clay’s assignment, but a part of him knew that it would have been all the better if his best friend had been able to meet his father. He’d always talked about Dhurke to Clay, but something about showing his best friend where he’d grown up without Dhurke there…

Without Dhurke ever there…

He shook his head. As it were, the sweet buns from Nahyuta and Rayfa would do. Rayfa had handed them over with a pout after their last trial, and Nahyuta had imparted a few words of wisdom on how to beat the heat without an air conditioner.

“How have you fixed your AC at least?”

Apollo groaned. He’d tossed his courtroom clothes into his room as soon as he’d arrived back at the offices, and had sprawled on the couch immediately following. “No, the mechanic had to reschedule on me, so I took the night off.”

“Good, you need it,” Clay, who was video chatting from his tablet in orbit, began moving. Apollo closed his eyes, afraid the strange movement would make him sick. “You’re a few cases away from needing a loony bin.”

“I’m—,”

“You’re fine, yeah, I know,” Clay sighed, and Apollo cracked an eye open to see him clamping the tablet down on a table and tether himself to it. “You’re always fine.”

“Hey, so are you,” Apollo frowned at him. “Don’t make this about me.”

“Wasn’t trying to,” Clay held up his hands in surrender. “I’m just saying. I’m glad you had tonight off.”

“Thanks.”

Outside, the sun was setting. Apollo rolled his head to the side to look at his TV. The gossip show had started a few minutes earlier, and the anchors were hotly debating…something. He rolled his eyes but kept watching anyway. On his computer, Clay had contorted himself to talk to one of his teammates. Their times to talk usually had a few interruptions, but he didn’t mind. So long as he could still talk to Clay, he would put up with almost anything.

The TV switched from covering the anchors to a festival setting, and Apollo’s breath caught in his throat.

Where the festival had taken place, he didn’t know, but it looked just as warm as he felt. It had been a big deal, apparently; the footage looked too crisp to come from a cell phone. The sound had been ripped straight from the board.
Meaning that Klavier Gavin showed up on his television clearly, and his voice filled the small space.

Immediately, Apollo turned his head back to his computer, trying to avert his ears. Luckily, the anchors kept talking.

He’d heard about Gavin’s band through the grapevine. The band had made a big fanbase in Khur’ain, and the local magazines were taking advantage of the craze. At first, it hadn’t bothered Apollo. He’d been happy to see Gavin getting back out in the world, in fact.

When he’d realized that Simon Blackquill had joined the band, however…

It was easy to see from afar. The way the two leaned on each other, the way they talked in the interviews…something was going on behind the scenes between them. He knew he shouldn’t be bothered, but…

He’d given Klavier time after Kristoph’s execution. Sure, the entire Kristoph situation had been hard for Apollo, but he couldn’t imagine what Klavier had been feeling. He remembered staring at his phone, trying to think of something—anything—to say, but no matter what he typed out, it sounded…wrong. His frustration at the situation only grew worse as time went on, and he had been so close to just asking Klavier if he wanted to hang out, but…

But then Clay’s attempted murder had happened. And Apollo had been told, for four days, that his best friend was dead.

Everything outside of that had been a blur. Before he knew it, he’d all but forgotten about Klavier Gavin. In the two years after the Phantom incident, he’d buried his head in his work and Clay’s rehabilitation. Everything else had taken the sidelines.

Then, Trucy had been accused of murder, and then everything with Dhurke had happened, and… he’d moved to Khur’ain. He’d uprooted everything to try and help Nahyuta rebuild. It had been difficult, at first, but now, almost a year later, his case load was starting to feel manageable, and his personal life no longer needed to take the back burner. They still had a long way to go, sure, but…

When he’d first seen Klavier’s band on the cover of Khur’ainese gossip magazines, for the first time, Apollo had felt…hope. Hope for something outside of the courtroom, for something he could work on outside of the law, for a return to normalcy, for…something more.

Followed by immediate anger, sure, but hope nonetheless.

Facing Nahyuta in court was challenging, yes, but when he thought about what it had been like to face off against Klavier, part of him wished for that exhilarating rush. The way Gavin’s eyes lit up whenever Apollo objected to his train of thought, the way he turned his attention to everyone as if they were the only person in the world…their few cases against each other had been a whirlwind of emotions. Not to mention that the last time they’d seen each other, Gavin had looked…well, different. Sadder. Apollo’s bracelet had all but cut off his circulation to his hand at that point, but Klavier had refused to speak to him. It was pointless, he knew, but the foolish part of him couldn’t help it.

At the end of the day, he had to face the facts: he’d missed his chance with Klavier. He’d moved halfway around the world, for goodness’ sake, and Klavier had obviously moved on. Even before then, he hadn’t opened up to Apollo. He wasn’t interested. If he and Simon Blackquill were a thing, Apollo could be—would be—happy for them. He’d made his choice to leave the States. He’d have to live with it.
“This is ground control to Major Justice,” Clay’s voice came from his computer, and Apollo jumped out of his musings. The television had turned to a still of Simon Blackquill turned toward the audience, one fist in the air, screaming words to the sky. A cheap crossfade showed him, at the festival, probably moments later. He was on his knees now, leaned back to still belt whatever he was saying at the sky. But his face was visible now, and he faced the crowd. Apollo had gleaned from his glimpses that their whole marketing thing revolved around Simon staying anonymous. *I wonder what changed,* he thought. The show cut back to the anchors and Apollo had half a mind to keep listening—

“Can you hear me, Major Justice?” Clay repeated, and he jumped, turning back to the screen. “Hey, there you are! Everything okay?”

“Y-yeah, sorry,” he shook his head. “Got distracted by the TV.” Clay’s face settled on a frustrating grin, and Apollo rolled his eyes. “What?”

“That’s not the ‘got distracted’ face,” he said. “That’s the ‘I-Was-Thinking-About-Pretty-Guys face.’”

“I do not have a face for thinking about pretty guys,” Apollo snapped. He could feel his face redden.

“Uh, you absolutely do.”

“You’re insane.”

“It’s not obvious, in case you were worried about it,” Clay sat back, and Apollo rolled his eyes again. “Only an Apollo Justice expert can see it.”

“An Apollo Justice expert? Is that what you’re calling yourself now?”

“Well, since everyone up here is an astronaut, it’s really the only other thing I’m good at.”

“Oh, shut up. You’re good at other things—,”

“So, who was it?”

Apollo blinked at his friend. “What?”

“Who was it? Who’s the new mystery man on your mind?”

“I don’t have to answer that question.”

“Oh, come on!” Clay whined, turning when one of his teammates bid him a goodnight. He called his goodnight to them and reached up to take off his visor. “The most exciting gossip I get from up here is the Kardashians, and I’m so sick of them.”

“The Kardashians? Seriously?”

“Yeah, they’re on their thirtieth season of the show or something. North is having an affair.”

Apollo just blinked at him. “Why do you know that?”

“Jemma’s really into it,” Clay sighed. “It’s all she talks about sometimes.” He shook his head. “But don’t try and change the subject! I asked you a question, buster!”

“Buster, really?”

“Who are you crushing on? Spill!”
Apollo shook his head, closing his eyes in disbelief. “I don’t want to talk about it.”

“It’s not Klavier Gavin again, is it?”

Apollo’s mouth snapped closed. He pursed his lips together.

“It is?” Clay sounded almost…disappointed. “Apollo…”

“He just came up on the TV,” Apollo said, fixing Clay with a look. “It’s not a big deal.”

“You were more in space than I am for a solid three minutes, I think it’s kind of a big deal.”

Apollo let out a long sigh. “I think he’s seeing someone.”

“Oh,” Clay sobered up. “You think so?”

“It’s pretty obvious to see, if you look hard enough.”

“I mean…I guess. Doesn’t really line up with their song lyrics, though.”

Apollo frowned. “You listen to their stuff?”

Clay’s eyes opened wide. “You don’t?”

“No.”

“Dude, you are sorely missing out. They’re good. You liked the Gaviners, right?”

“I—.”

“Oh shut up, everyone knows you dig them. It’s like that, but heavier. Give them a try.”

“Yeah, sure, okay, but what were you saying about their lyrics?”

“Oh,” Clay typed on his keyboard a little, and a moment later, a red notification glared at Apollo. He raised an eyebrow but opened the box anyway. Clay had sent him a copy and pasted set of lyrics. He’d just finished reading them when another got sent his way. “Look. Lyrics from their songs.”

Unimpressed, Apollo read through the second set Clay had sent him. The first set had been about a child prodigy or something, and the most recent about refusing to apologize for discomfort.

“Okay, I’m looking,” he said, and more came his way. “Whoa! Easy there, man. What’s this supposed to prove?”

“The band has said—more than once—that most of the songs are written by Simon and Klavier,” Clay explained as more stanzas appeared on the screen. “But most of the songs they sing are about…I dunno, not being good enough, or pining after someone. Doesn’t sound like they’re seeing anyone.”

Apollo shook his head, and fixed Clay with a look. “It’s because they’re seeing each other, bro.”

Clay stopped. He frowned at Apollo. “You think?”

“Uh, yeah. I think so.”

Clay frowned. “But…Simon’s songs are all about thinking he’s a monster, or pining after someone. Look! Right here!” Another set of lyrics. “This one’s about hating the blood in his veins!” Apollo
frowned, reading the new set that came through. Sure enough, the words reflected what Clay had said. “And this one, this is a Klav song—,”

“Klav? Seriously?”

“Shut up, it’s what he likes to be called,” Clay said, and another set appeared. “This Klav song is about living two lives, being two people. Not being able to be the person he wants to be.”

Apollo’s frown returned, and he gnawed at his lower lip as he read through the lyrics. Something felt…off.

“To me, it doesn’t look like they’re together. Maybe close, yeah, but everyone thinks we’re married, so…”

“Wait,” Apollo cut him off. “Send me more of the ones Simon sings.”

Clay blinked at him. “What?”

“Just…please? Do it for me?”

“Uh…sure,” Clay’s brow furrowed, and he fixed Apollo with a look. “What are you thinking down there?”

“I’m thinking something isn’t lining up,” Apollo said.

“Okay,” he sighed, and continued typing. “Here you go.”

A few seconds later, Apollo was staring at a new set of stanzas. He sat up straighter on the couch, pulling his legs under himself and leaning forward. He concentrated on the lyrics, reading the words over and over.

Child prodigies, not having to prove himself, anger at an abusive, authoritarian, austere figure…

“They’re singing each other’s songs,” Apollo said, and Clay frowned at him.

“What?” He snapped. “No, they’re…”

“Look,” Apollo pointed at his screen, even though he knew Clay couldn’t see what he was pointing at. “This one talks about how he hates his blood, right?”

“Okay.”

“And this one,” he scrolled down to an earlier stanza, “is about rebelling against an authority figure.”

“Wasn’t Simon in jail?”

“Yes, but it’s an abusive authority figure.”

“I don’t know about you, but last time I checked, prison isn’t exactly a lovely place to be.”

“Look, just trust me on this,” Apollo said, staring at the words. “I’ll figure it out more later, I just…I have a feeling about this.”

“All right, so…they’re singing each other’s songs,” Clay shrugged. “What are you gonna do about it? Post it on a subreddit? I think Klav’s got a few…”
Apollo stared at one of the first ones Clay had sent. It was about feeling—or being—a failure, and about trying to find any reason to live.

Something squeezed in Apollo’s chest. He bit his lips together.

“What’s up?” Clay asked, and when Apollo looked up at the screen, he saw Clay’s brow furrowed in concern. “Bro, if you’re going to start hyper fixating on this…”

“How does he look?” Apollo asked, looking back up at the TV. By now, the show had moved on, and the end credits were rolling. Part of him knew that he could look for himself; a quick Google search would give him all the answers he ever needed.

But the thought of it…his heart pounded faster in his chest.

I made my choice, Apollo thought. I…I need to let him move on.

“How does he look?” Clay parroted him. “What’s that supposed to mean?”

“I mean, does he look good? Happy?” He tried to recall any photos of Gavin he’d seen recently, and all he could remember was a haircut. Clay was silent for a moment, and Apollo sighed. “I just…have a few concerns, Clay. I’m not going to hyper fixate on it, I promise.” I don’t know if I could with the work I’ve got in front of me…

“All right,” Clay sighed. “He’s…not looking too good.”

Apollo’s eyes closed, and he pursed his lips into a tight line. “Are you sure? Like…is it noticeable?”

Clay laughed. “Bro, I’m not even on the same planet and I can see he’s not doing well. You should look for yourself.”

“Maybe,” Apollo muttered. “Look, I should go to bed. Early morning and all that.”

“Apollo—,”

“Yeah?” He turned back to the screen, and Clay was frowning at him.

“Are you gonna be okay?”

He smiled.

“Yeah. You can still talk on Wednesday, right?”

“Ja, Wednesday works,” Klavier said, waving off the woman hovering around him for makeup. He pressed ‘end’ on the call, leaning back in the chair. Part of him wanted to just relax; they’d finished recording the album a week prior, and Dee had booked them the photoshoot today to try and put the booklet for the CD print together. It was their last thing before a month break, and he could hardly wait.

His head pounded with the remnants of a hangover, which he currently attempted to chase away with a mimosa. Dee had booked the photoshoot for ten in the morning, a time when Klavier should have been asleep. As it were, he’d forced himself out of bed with four hours of sleep and dragged himself to the curb so Simon could drive them to the studio.
Oh, Simon, Klavier thought, glancing in his mirror to see the man himself fussing over the makeup artist trying to cover up the dark circles around his eyes. The makeup man huffed in frustration as he moved on, and Simon readjusted himself in the chair. I have a feeling you’re going to wish you’d kept the mask on.

Three weeks had passed since he’d revealed his face, and since Klavier had disappeared for two days. The tension between he and Simon had all but abated for the present, and now they were back to the strained ‘you annoy me/I want to annoy you’ friendship they’d carried on with beforehand. Mostly, Klavier was happy for the switch back to normal. He’d always been good with avoiding conflict, and the issue with Simon wasn’t going to be permanent.

Because he didn’t have a problem…right?

Of course not, he thought, his hand pausing over the mimosa for a moment before he reached instead for the water in front of him. I don’t have a problem. I’m just…coping. The alcohol helps me perform and sleep.

...And wake up, and talk with producers, and—

“Klav, you’re wanted in two minutes,” Dee’s voice came from behind him, and he turned to see her peeking her head in the door before turning to Simon. “Simon, you ready for headshots now?”

Blackquill looked up, his eyes betraying the deer-in-the-headlights feeling Klavier knew was there for only a moment before he schooled his face back into the indifference he wanted. “Of course,” he said, pushing away from the vanity and taking a look at Klavier. “Don’t leave me with them forever, yeah?”

“Ja,” Klaiver grinned, taking a drink from the water bottle in his hand. “Just gotta make sure my eyeliner is ready.”

“Can’t have the pretty princess looking like he’s from 2007,” Simon returned the smirk on his way out the door. The makeup artists followed suit, and when the door shut behind them, Klavier let himself fall against the back of the chair. The bright lights from the vanity dulled when he closed his eyes, but the water did little to quiet the pounding headache behind his eyes. Without reopening them, he screwed the cap back on the bottle and rubbed his forehead.

Whoever invented water is insane, he thought, sitting straight up again and inspecting himself. His hair had been schooled into his updo for the shoot, and he’d picked a black blazer and jeans over a dark gray hoodie for the group shots, but something still felt…off. He’d figure it out eventually.

The mimosa stared at him from the counter, and he tried pointedly ignoring it, but the longer he sat and stared at himself, the louder it became. In his hands, the water bottle crinkled.

It was on the house, Klavier thought, tossing the empty bottle onto the towel. I can’t be rude and leave it.

“Mr. Gavin?” A voice came from the hallway, and the door opened. An intern with a tray poked her head in to see Klavier downing the rest of the drink. He set the empty glass down in front of him and looked at her in the mirror.

“Ja, Fraülein?”

“Um, you’re wanted for some headshots.”

“Fantastic,” he grinned and hopped to his feet. “I’ll be right there.”
“Another drink, sir?” She asked, and Klavier stepped up to her, staring at the glass on her tray. A moment passed, and she could feel her heartbeat pounding in her chest. She hoped—vaguely—it wasn’t audible.

“Ach, why not,” he muttered, taking the drink from her and downing it in a matter of seconds. He replaced it on the tray and fixed her with a wide grin. “Shall we?” He asked, ignoring the soft notification of a new email from his backpack.

Three weeks passed. The photoshoot had ended well, and Klavier had spent his time on break… well, he wasn’t finding himself, despite what he told those who wanted to see him, but he had spent it lounging around the house and working on new songs. He’d pointedly left his phone off for a vast majority of the break, but had returned from the shower that morning to see a few new notifications. He lost a fight against a yawn as he swiped through the emails that accumulated overnight. He was about to turn the phone off again when it buzzed in his hand.

He opened it, and then Klavier stared at a new email from Dee for a moment.

Then another moment.

He’d been having a good day, which was pretty rare lately, not like he was trying to keep track. He hadn’t been trying to keep track for months; in fact, the last few months had felt like an eternity.

All in all, the album had done well. Dee had been keeping him up to date on how it’d been doing, much to his delight. He’d watched it climb the charts from the sidelines. The break was much needed, yes, but he was itching to get back in the groove of touring. Jack, Betsy, and Rhys had been pretty scarce the first few weeks, but the group chat had lit up as soon as the album had dropped. The tour for the new album was set to start in a week and a half’s time, and Klavier and Dee had been working out a game plan for the next leg. They’d emailed and texted back and forth, but the one he currently stared at, well…

It was a lot to unpack. He’d asked for an update on a few items, and, as always, Dee had delivered.

Firstly, the new guitarist. While Jack had relatively kept his behavior good lately, Klavier’s mind kept reminding him of the coldness behind his eyes when they’d fought. It had scared him then. It scared him now, too, just thinking about it. He’d seen that kind of coldness before, in Daryan and Kristoph.

Dee had made a few contacts that were interested. She’d met with a few, and had plans to introduce the new guitarist to him in two days.

Two days.

Klavier would have to clean his apartment. Again.

They’d planned to get lunch first, and then jam at his place; everyone in the band had keys to the new space, and, since Klavier hadn’t necessarily talked to Jack since their spat, he hadn’t broached the subject of replacing him. So, his apartment was the next best option.

Unfortunately, he hadn’t gotten around to cleaning the apartment since returning, and it looked like a nightmare.
He had two days. It could happen. Maybe.

Secondly, the album was doing well. So were the tour’s presale tickets. He hadn’t been too worried about that; the tour would happen whether or not anyone showed up. He’d play his music for an empty room, for fuck’s sake, so long as he was able to play it. But that wasn’t what gave him pause.

Their ticket sales had specifically killed in the Kingdom of Khur’ain. He’d always known, in the back of his head, that the band was popular in Khur’ain. It had shown up in most of their demographics, and had lurked in the back of his mind since day one. The Khur’ainese were closet metalheads, the bastards, and he hadn’t been prepared for them. And, to make matters worse, they’d sold out the concert scheduled there in a matter of minutes.

Suddenly, Dee’s constant suggestions that they perform there in the past years seemed more reasonable. Not even that, though, was what gave him such pause.

“We have room for another Khur’ain show,” she’d written. “What do you think?”

He stared at the question. He knew, logically, that this all could have been avoided if he’d just agreed to stop there on their past tours. But no, he’d been concerned with the only defense attorney in the country, and had refused to play there.

Stupid, stupid, stupid, he thought. He’d been doing fine—well, better than usual—for the last few weeks. Not sober, heavens no, but…better.

Pursing his lips tightly together, he swapped to his texts. Dee’s conversation was the latest one the queue.

Do we have to? He typed in and hit ‘send’ before he could rethink his question. The reply was almost instantaneous.

Klav, I’ve been finding off khuranese booking agents for almost two years now.

Klavier sighed, pressing his fist to his mouth. Had the band really been around for almost two years?

Preposterous, he initially thought, but…when he thought about it more…

His phone vibrated again, and he looked down to see another text from Dee.

They’re asking if we could do three shows, actually.

Klavier blinked down at the phone.

3???????

Two years, klav. They’re waiting for a response.

He bit his lips together.

Do we even have room for two extra shows?

It’ll be a tight fit, but yes.

His shoulders rose and fell with an exaggerated sigh. Three shows. In Khur’ain.

He hated how much his heart raced at the idea of seeing Apollo again. Just…a glimpse would be
enough, he figured. Something to know that the tiny defense attorney was doing all right. He’d left so suddenly. Klavier hadn’t meant to ignore his…dared he call him ‘friend’? He’d just…

Apollo deserved better, and Klavier couldn’t give that to him. Hell, he couldn’t even be happy that Apollo’s best friend hadn’t died. A brief glimpse was selfish, he knew, but—Maybe some closure on something will help, a part of his mind pointed out, and he sighed.

Oh, hell, he thought, typing out a response to Dee before opening his twitter. Ignoring the notifications in the bottom corner of the screen, he opened the ‘new tweet’ screen. His thumbs moved quickly over the little keyboard.

@the-achtung-baby: Khur’ain! You asked for three shows, you got it! We’re announcing two more shows in Khur’ain, stay tuned for ticket sales!

He stared at the tweet for a moment. Dee hadn’t necessarily told him not to announce the extra shows right away, so there wouldn’t be any harm in it…right?

His mind moved back to Apollo, unbidden, and he sighed. If he were coming back to the States, I’d want to hear it from him, not from the Wright Anything Agency, he thought bitterly. He hit ‘tweet’ and tossed the phone onto the table. It made a satisfying ‘clang’ as it landed, and Klavier moved to the kitchen, grabbing the bottle of pills next to where his phone stopped. They rattled when he shook it, a satisfying reminder that he wasn’t as alone as his ridiculous penthouse wanted him to feel.

Moments later, halfway around the world, Apollo Justice squawked and almost dropped his phone in the crowded square. The sudden movement made Ema Skye turn to him, phone pressed to her ear. She glanced at the screen, curious to what had caused such a reaction. He’d left his phone open to his Twitter application.

“Everything all right?” She asked, holding the phone away from her mouth. Nahyuta was going on about something or another; he’d sum it up for her if she missed anything important.

“Oh, y-yeah,” He muttered, locking his phone and shoving it in his back pocket. They shuffled forward in line, closer to the popsicle stand. “What were you saying about the forensic reports?”

Chapter End Notes

Good to finally have the second part of the main ship show up….right? Let me know what you think!
It's hard for me to love myself right now
I've waited, hated, blamed it all on you--
Needed to be strong, yet I was always too weak
So I can only blame myself for this state we are in,
I will take what you have for me now if it's not too late

It's fun at work to butcher the english language and have people go 'Yeah, she's the one that writes stories for fun.'
Ain't nobody know the cow better'n the butcher, amirite?

“Klavier Gavin is at it again,” the news anchor said on the recording, which Simon watched with crossed arms. “His metal band is making waves in the rock scene with frontrunner Simon Blackquill, a former nobody in the industry.” The camera changed to a shot of Klavier playing onstage, green lights pulsating around him. A column of fire appeared right before it moved again, showing Simon stomping out onto the stage in beat with the song. The breath in his lungs left in a silent whoosh, and Simon bit his lips together. He was so used to seeing himself with the mask on, in the background, that it still surprised him to see his face on a screen. “Just a few years ago, Simon Blackquill was an infamous prosecutor serving time for murder,” he dug his fingers into his arms, “but following an amazing ‘not guilty’ turnabout for the legal books, he joined fellow prosecutor Klavier Gavin in a surprising turn of events.” They’d shot the concert for a music video; how the station had gotten their hands on the footage, he wasn’t sure. Dee probably had something to do with it. She had a knack for ‘leaking’ certain pieces of information when it benefited her. He watched himself start singing his part, his jaw moving out of time with the background music on the program.

“Yes, it’s a marketing scheme,” the man rolled his eyes. “He’s a performer.”

The two continued arguing, and Simon’s mouth twitched up in a grin. He could remember a time—
very recently, considering—when he would have prickled at the idea of being called a performer. *Now,* he figured, *I guess that’s...what I am,* isn’t it?

“You’re watching this garbage?” A voice came from behind him, and Simon turned to see Klavier standing behind him with remote in hand. His hair had was a nightmare from the night before, and the way he leaned on the counter betrayed a wobble Simon had grown to associate with an inebriated Klavier. He pursed his lips together, but didn’t say anything. The hotel was cold, even for Simon, and the seemingly unnoticed goosebumps on Klavier’s arms made his tattoos look almost fuzzy.

“I was taking some notes,” he smirked. “They seem to like your hair.”

“Ha, ha,” Klavier deadpanned and turned the channel on the television. The “We should give you a haircut. You’re getting pretty shaggy.”

Self conscious, Simon reached up and brushed his bangs further out of his face. On his shoulder, Taka picked at his feathers. “I can’t tell you how many times I’ve asked Dee if I can get a haircut.”

“Ach, yes, Dee.” Klavier sighed. “Speaking of which, she’s asking that we get on the bus now.”

Simon blinked, and turned to his phone, sitting on the coffee table in front of him. He’d completely lost track of time, watching the blithering entertainment shows on the television. They were beginning their next tour for the new album, and though the past month had been a good reprieve, he knew—at least subconsciously—he might as well get his head back in the game. He’d been waiting at the bus station for a while, now. The attendant behind the desk must have recognized him, because he’d gasped and immediately turned the TV to the entertainment show. Simon had been annoyed, at first. It has like everyone had forgotten that he was first and foremost a prosecutor, not a singer.

Though, they were coming up on their second years as a band...he could see how everyone kept mixing it up.

“Just lost track of time,” he said, pushing himself to his feet. He turned to face Klavier fully, and for a moment, it was like he’d gone weeks without seeing the man.

Spending so long with someone, you could go months with seeing them every day, but rarely taking a moment to really see them. The bags under Klavier Gavin’s eyes were darker than he remembered. His cheeks had been...less sunken in, the last time Simon remembered looking at him. Maybe he’d been wearing makeup, but...even the shirt Gavin wore seemed to billow off of him as if he were wearing three sizes too large. His hair, neatly cropped to the side of his head, as always, seemed...duller. He couldn’t help but notice that the belt around his waist had a few new holes punched into it to account for his slimmer waist.

For all intents and purposes, Simon felt as though he were staring at a shell of the former man.

“Fop-dono—,”

“The bus!” Klavier snapped his fingers in front of his face, turning before Simon could edge out another word. With a sigh, Simon followed him out of the hotel lobby and to the bus waiting outside for them. Dee awaited them with a flash drive, which she handed to Klavier.

“Was ist das?” He asked, and Simon came up short behind him.

“New mixes,” Dee explained, gesturing him to continue up the stairs. “Come on, we’ve got four hours to be five hours away from here, let’s go!”
A little over four hours later, Simon pulled off the headphones over his ears to look at Rhys, who was half draped over the chair in front of him.

“What do you think?” The redhead asked, and Simon pursed his lips.

“It sounds good,” he said. “Different from the last one.”

“I think it sounds like our first album,” Stein chimed in. “I liked that one best.”

“It’s only our third,” Rhys rolled his eyes.

“Right! Three albums in a little over a year and a half? Who does that?” Stein sat up from across the way. “I think we should pace ourselves.”

“As if we’re gonna run out of things to write,” Rhys sighed. “Any notes you wanna give to post-production, Simon?”

Simon blinked, and turned to try and find Klavier. The back of the bus showed that Jack and Betsy were talking with Dee over something or another, but the lack of the fop’s head must have meant he was sleeping. As annoying as it was that he’d be gone when Simon needed him, he couldn’t blame the man for actually trying to get a few winks before a long night.

“Um.” He blinked down at the computer. “I can’t really hear the keys well for most of the last song.”

“What?” Stein asked, sitting forward and holding out his hand. “Let me hear!”

Simon obliged him. It was a keyboard-heavy song, and Stein had been so proud of the work he’d poured into it. Sure, the critique was minor, but as he’d learned with their previous mixes, if he wasn’t picky, he’d pay for it later.

He’d just pressed ‘play’ for Stein as the bus rolled to a stop, and he turned to see a small venue on his right. Dee shot into a standing position and hurried past them, followed slowly by Jack and Betsy.

“Come on, come on,” she waved, “we’re late for set up!”

“Isn’t this why we have roadies?” Betsy muttered as she passed, and Stein sighed as he handed over the headphones to Simon.

“Show me later, okay?” He said, and Simon nodded and shut the laptop.

“We can get roadies once you all get your next album out,” Dee clapped her hands. “Klav! Get up, you lazy fop!”

Slowly, in the front of the bus, Klavier’s head peeked over the top of one of the seats. “Five more minutes?”

“Absolutely not! Let’s go!”

With a sigh, Klavier pulled himself out of the seat. Simon followed Rhys and Stein, both of whom Klavier let pass before he stepped into the aisle.
“Got your beauty sleep?” Simon asked, and Klavier waved his hand over his head.

“Ja, ja, ja,” he bobbed down the stairs. “Just you wait, Herr Samurai, one of these days you’re going to want beauty sleep as much as I do.”

“Balderdash.”

“I can feel the diva in you,” Klavier bounced on the ground, and Simon peered out to see the driver opening the storage under the bus. “You should let him out.”

Simon blinked at Klavier. It was still odd to be out in public without the mask on, but the hot sun above felt good on his skin.

“That’s absolutely not right,” Simon frowned, shoving his hands in his pockets. Klavier frowned at him.

“Of course it is. Everyone has a diva inside of them. You’re just getting to know him.”

“Nonsense.”

“Herr Samurai—,”

“I already know my diva,” he cut Klavier off. “And she requires caffeine. Now.”

Klavier stopped, mouth open as if to come back with a witty remark, but threw his head back and laughed instead. Simon grinned, but it only lasted for a moment before Dee was elbowing Klavier and shooting him a dirty look to pay attention.

Simon didn’t mind setting up their equipment. His entire experience with the music industry was so niche that he knew he was spoiled, but there was something satisfying about carrying his bandmates’ supplies that he felt like he was really part of the team. Compared with Betsy, Stein, Jack, and Rhys, who had been trying to break into the industry for a while, he figured he could do most of the grunt work they’d been doing for years. He carried Betsy’s drum pieces for her, though he didn’t dare try and set them up. She gave him a quick smile every time he brought her more of her set, and when he was finished, he moved to helping Rhys and Jack with their amplifiers. When they’d first started touring, he’d felt like an absolute buffoon, but now, as he set down Jack’s equipment for him, he felt like part of the team. Ever since he and Klavier’s spat, Jack had kept mostly to himself, something for which Simon could hardly blame him, but as he scoped out the space, he caught one of Jack’s… looks.

They happened every once in a while, and for a few months, Simon had been cautious of the man for them. They weren’t malicious, no, but something about them… unnerved him. He couldn’t read Jack when he got that look about him, and it triggered the same feeling he’d gotten from the Phantom during the resolution of the UR-1 incident.

It chilled him to his core.

Simon set down the equipment and turned to the side of the stage quickly, where Dee was receiving trays of coffee from the venue staff. She slapped his hand away as he reached for the creamer, and he turned to her with a quizzical look.

“No dairy,” she chided, and Simon frowned.

“It doesn’t have dairy in it,” he said. She fixed him with a look.
“No dairy.” She repeated. Simon sighed.

“Fine.” He raised his cup to his lips and took a long sip. It was hot still, and threatened to singe his tongue, but he didn’t terribly mind. It was a good kick in the face after a rushed road trip. Dee pointed one of the stagehands to Betsy, and he turned to her. “O Great and Wise Manager, what if I told you I no longer wanted a hair cut?”

She narrowed her eyes for a moment, and then rolled them. “You’re scheduled for next week already, dummy.”

A grin pulled at the side of his mouth, and he took another sip of his coffee. He shook her head and pointed a finger at him.

“That was not reverse psychology,” she called after him as he moved to the stage again. “I already had you scheduled!”

Klavier’s head turned to the side as Simon approached him, and he fixed him with a grin. “What are you doing to our lovely manager, Herr Samurai?”

“The usual,” Simon muttered, looking out into the audience space with the fop. The sounds of the band getting ready around them took up the lapse in conversation, and Simon turned the cardboard sleeve hugging his cup. Klavier had his arms folded over his chest, and his eyebrows were knit together on his forehead. “What are you thinking about?” He asked, keeping his voice down.

“Currently?” Klavier pursed his lips in a pout. “Elephants.”

Simon rolled his eyes. “That’s fine, I didn’t want to know anyway.”

“Was? I was really thinking about how many elephants we could fit in here.”

Simon stared at Klavier as he took a long sip of coffee, and Klavier rolled his eyes.

“You know, you don’t have to hide your constant worry for me,” Klavier turned to him. “I am an adult, Herr Samurai.”

Simon felt his gut twist. Klavier didn’t have to say about what he was talking. The truce between them had been a nice reprieve, but he’d known that something was coming.

He just wished it could have happened in a more private setting.

“I think you and I both know that my worry isn’t unfounded,” He said quietly, and Klavier rolled his eyes.

“My only problem is that I’m being babysat by four people,” Klavier muttered. “This isn’t my first tour, and it isn’t my first band. This is just…what I do.”

Simon raised an eyebrow at him. “This is what you do?”

Klavier’s eyes turned back to him, an angry glare in the blue irises. “What’s that supposed to mean?”

“You are most certainly not fine,” Simon hissed. “I’ve seen convicts on death row more composed than you.”

Klavier rolled his eyes. “What, like you were all calm, cool, and collected while you were waiting to be executed?” Recoiling slightly, Simon bit his lips together. Klavier softened at the expression, and turned away again. His nostrils flared as he tried to control his temper. “Verzeihung,” he muttered.
“But I…really don’t want to talk about it.”

“Klavier—,”

“I promise I will when I’m ready to,” he said, looking back up and meeting his eyes. “Just…please Simon. Let me work through this myself for now.”

Simon’s lips, still pursed into a tight line, slightly relaxed, and he took a step back. He’d only heard Klavier call him ‘Simon’ a few times, and a part of him knew that pushing the subject would essentially push Klavier further away, as well.

“Very well,” he muttered after a moment. “But you know where to find me, should you need me.”

With that, he turned on his heel, and stormed off.

Simon kept to himself, mostly, for the rest of the day. He and Stein had dinner, listened again to the new mixes, and signed a few pieces of merchandise before the show. They pointedly kept the conversation away from Klavier; Stein had seen the two speaking during setup and did his best to distract Simon from the conversation. They were almost the same height, but Stein’s blond hair as a neat contrast to Simon’s own. Also in contrast to Simon, he was an excellent conversationalist. Personally, Simon didn’t care much for small talk, or trivial gonigs-on around the world, but Stein had a way of making the most menial topics interesting. Simon could hardly blame him. Apparently he’d grown up an only child, so he knew how to keep himself occupied. Simon should have liked him less than he did, but something about Stein made him approachable. Which meant people gravitated toward him, instead of Simon. He was a perfect shield.

Currently, he was ringing in the opening of one of Klavier’s songs. Simon watched from the side of the stage; though he’d revealed his face, he still wasn’t comfortable with running an entire concert, so they always scheduled in a break for him. He didn’t mind watching Klavier’s lead songs from the side of the stage; in fact, it was a good time for him to rehydrate before finishing their set. The song was the one he and Stein had listened to a few times earlier in the day, and Simon had to admit that it was one of his favorites off the new album. Jack even seemed to like it—at least, he didn’t look so sour when he stepped up to provide the harmonies written for him. All in all, Simon appreciated the reprieve.

Their latest album had dropped weeks prior; Dee wanted to hold off on the latest mixes for a few months before releasing an EP of b-sides.

If he were being honest, Simon couldn’t wait. He enjoyed the new songs, and though he was alright with an EP, he would have rather waited and lumped them in with a new album entirely. Dee knew he and Klavier had enough material to keep her busy for years, but she was starting to get earnest about spacing out their releases.

A part of him, the same part that had mused after being called a performer, rather than an attorney, scoffed. When had he actually started getting excited about new releases?

He shook his head. His excitement stretched further than the new release. Klavier had met with a few hopefuls on their month off, and he’d narrowed down Jack’s replacement to two new musicians. Jack and Klavier had rarely ever said anything cordial to each other anymore, but that
wasn’t too far off from when the band had started. Simon watched the man now, bobbing his head as he played along with the song. According to Dee, they were going to wait to tell him until they’d signed someone else on; Simon knew, technically, that Jack’s final meeting would be a nightmare, but he figured that bridge would be crossed when they came to it. For now, he’d just have to sit on the sideline and wait for Dee and Klavier to make their move.

Klavier stepped up to the microphone and started singing the last chorus. His voice, strong over the monitors, was clear as a bell. He’d had this song ready to be written for so long, and now as he leaned away from the microphone so he could belt the words, Simon felt his core shift.

He’d had an itching feeling in the back of his brain since seeing the lyrics, one he couldn’t quite place. He was used to seeing Klavier’s grief and guilt over Kristoph in his lyrics, but this one…it was less about what Kristoph had done, and more of what Kristoph had taught Klavier.

As the song reached its end, and Klavier struck the last chord, he leaned his head back, letting Stein’s outro assuage the audience as they began cheering. He stayed like that, bent over backward, eyes closed for a moment, and Simon caught the hurt behind the words. It was something Klavier tried so hard to hide; from Simon, from the band, from himself, even, but in the raw energy of the music, he could no longer hide from it.

Simon understood that, now. Standing in front of a sea of strangers, baring your soul for them to see…it was hard. He, like Klavier (well, a little more than Klavier), enjoyed his privacy. The words they wrote into their music showed a different side of them, one that they hardly like to look at themselves.

But damn, if it wasn’t cathartic to scream those words. And have them be screamed back at you.

In that moment, Simon wasn’t watching Klavier Gavin, rockstar; he was watching Klavier Gavin, survivor.

And damn, if he didn’t feel a kinship with the man.

Just as quickly as it’d come, the expression was gone, and Betsy crashed into the next song. Klavier righted himself, his mouth pulled up in a grin and jaw dropped in a cackle.

Simon blinked.

He’d seen Klavier do it so many times, but…

Maybe it was how many times he’d heard the song that day. Maybe it was his current train of thought. Maybe it was the conversation he’d had with Klavier earlier that day.

But when Klavier Gavin cackled into the microphone, he heard Kristoph Gavin’s laugh.

“Are you quite mad, Blackquill?” He heard in his subconscious. “I suppose so, for you to have murdered that woman.” He’d tensed at that, and Kristoph had been lucky that he’d been shackled. “I gave up everything for my foolish little brother. If I were to see him now, everything I’ve taught him would be ruined.”

“Why?” Simon had asked, feeling a wave of secondhand rage. “You could let him just…live. Have closure.”

Kristoph had scoffed at that. “Have you seen a puppet live on without the puppeteer?”

“I’ve had the pleasure of reading Pinocchio a few times—,”
“Klavier was born to be a puppet. Even now, as he grovels and tries to get in, he cannot live without me.”

“So you want him to die, then?”

“If I must die, then so should he,” Kristoph’s voice had been so cold. “It’s like he said so many times when we were little. We’re brothers; we should do everything together.”

“You taught him that.”

“I did,” Kristoph had said, triumphantly. “And I taught it to him so well that he’ll be dead within three years.”

Simon’s nostrils had flared. “You can’t know that.”

At that, Kristoph had actually laughed. It was hollow, sinister. Simon’s nose had turned up in straight disgust, and he’d felt his spine tingle.

“Of course I can know that! Do you want to know how?”

Simon hadn’t said a thing.

“Because I’ve taught him that he can’t avoid his issues. He must learn from the things we’ve been through together, and this will be the last thing we will go through. Together. You mark my words, Blackquill; he won’t know what he’s had until it’s lost.”

“And what is that, exactly?”

“When the hammer drops, and I’m gone, he’ll be dead within three years.”

Klavier’s voice cut through his mind, and Simon flinched back into reality. The song was different than the one he’d last heard…how long had he been standing there?

Next to him, Dee had turned to face him, her arms crossed over her chest. He turned to her, and she raised an eyebrow. He waved it off, taking another sip of the water she’d handed him. He’d be back on after this song.

He’d keep Klavier alive. He wasn’t sure how, especially when the man was so hell-bent on drinking himself to death, but…

He’d find a way.

Chapter End Notes

I saw a post that was like ‘boy this fanfic can fit so much self projection into it’ and I screamed.
Someone @’d me so hard in that moment.
Change (In the House of Flies)

Chapter Summary

I watched the change in you
It's like you never had wings
And you feel so alive
I have watched you change

Chapter Notes

Anyone else listening to the Bastille album on repeat and barely anything else? No one? Just me?
...Okay, fine. That and my other playlists for this universe.
I really appreciate all the feedback on the prior chapters! You all keep me working my butt off to keep cranking this one out, and I'm so excited to get the next few chapters rolling, so...without further ado...

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Klavier had heard a lot of strange things over the course of his life. He’d travelled the world at seventeen, been in not one, but two smashing rock bands, and had seen the most famous—and remote—places in more countries than he could remember. Take, for instance, the fact that he could know, logically, he’d performed in the Czech Republic. But if anyone asked him what he’d done in the country…

Well, he’d be stumped. All he remembered, when it came down to it, were a few glimpses of a raging party and a great show. For his own good, in fact, Dee hadn’t accepted any shows in the area in years. He was determined to get her to agree to a stop there again the next time they were in Europe. If he thought long and hard about it, he could remember so many different cultures, experiences, and sounds.

None of it had prepared him for the sound of a Warba’ad.

“Scheiße!” He hissed as he moved through the Khur’ainese marketplace, jumping and cringing away from the sound. Rhys, who he had cringed into, raised an eyebrow and took a look at the bird.

“What the actual is that?” He asked, continuing to stare even when Dee ushered them forward.

“It’s called a Warba’ad. National bird or something,” She explained, watching the bird as they continued forward. Out of the corner of her eye, she could see Jack, Simon, Stein, and Betsy sidetracked by a merchant, and she rolled her eyes. Would it kill any of them to actually keep to a schedule once in a while?

“It’s terrifying,” Klavier stated simply.

“It’s patriotic.”
“Yeah, okay.”

She’d agreed to a cultural tour before realizing how absolutely insane the market would be. Hell, she could probably leave them all in the vicinity for a day, and they’d get as much ‘culture’ as a stuffy tour guide would give them. Had she done that, she could’ve had a day off to relax, and—

“Ms. Richter!” A young voice came from her side, and she stopped in place. She’d placed a hand on Klavier and Rhys’ backs to keep them moving, and when she stopped, she almost forgot to latch onto them to get them to stop with her. She did so, grabbing onto their shirts, and Klavier (who was, as usual, halfway through a conversation) choked on the collar of his sweatshirt.

She refused to feel bad. It was his fault, anyway; who wore a sweatshirt in a Khura’in summer?

“Yes?” She turned to see a young boy, hardly as tall as her, standing on a box under one of the awnings for Khura’inese scarves. They watched each other for a few seconds before the rest of the band caught up. She raised an eyebrow. She’d been talking with a tour guide for a few days, but had imagined someone older, someone…

Well, who better fit the picture of a shady businessman in her head.

Instead, she stared at a preteen boy as he hopped off the box and wormed his way through the crowd to her. When they were a few feet apart, he stopped in place. His kimono, a blue and white garb that hardly met his knees, had a few spots of—flour?—on it. She blinked. The boy stretched his hands out in front of himself and then pushed them together, bowing.

“Um—,”

“Hap’piraki!” He said, straightening and fixing the group with a grin. A dog poked its way out from a passing group, and took a seat at the boy’s feet.

“Mr. Ur’gaid?” She asked, blinking from the dog, back to the boy, and then back again.

“That’s me!” He said. “But I understand Americans prefer a hearty handshake. So!” He held out his hand to her. “Pleasure to meet you, Ms. Richter!”

“Mrs.,” she corrected, taking his hand. His eyes widened, and he bowed again, not breaking the handshake.

“I’m so sorry! I just assumed—!”

“It’s fine, Mr. Ur’gaid,” she laughed. “This is the band.”

He straightened, finally releasing her hand and looking at the people with her. His mouth opened in a half-grin, and he bowed to them next.

“Hap’piraki!” He greeted them. “Welcome to the Kingdom of Khur’ain!”

Simon was the only one to respond appropriately. He copied the bow and repeated “Hap’piraki,” back to the boy without skipping a beat. Betsy, Rhys, and Stein followed suit, and then finally Klavier. Jack shoved his hands further into his pockets, and it was all Dee could do not to smack him over the head.

“Everyone, this is Ahlbi Ur’gaid,” she explained instead. “He’ll be taking us on our tour—,”

“Indeed!” Ahlbi stepped in, reaching into his bag. “But first! Might I offer some magatah’m’an to
"Uh, sure," Klavier muttered, taking the food with an appreciative eyebrow raise. Ahlbi’s hand, now empty, flattened and his eyebrows rose on his forehead. Klavier blinked at him. “Um…?”

“That’ll be twenty dahmas, please.”

Klavier blinked again, and turned to Dee, who sighed and dug in her purse. “Here’s one hundred and forty. Just give us all one.”

Ahlbi bowed to her and rose with a wide grin. “Thank you very much! Now!” He dug in his bag for a moment before turning to them, a bun for each in his hands. “Allow me to explain to you all the significance of the marketplace!”

Klavier shot Rhys a look, taking a bite into the overpriced offering and following the boy along the way.

“And this,” Ahlbi said almost two hours later, sweeping his hand across their most recent destination, “is the High Court of Khura’in.”

Klavier shoved his hands further into his kangaroo pocket, letting out a low whistle and rocking back on his heels. He had to turn his head to take in the whole building.

“That’s…” Betsy trailed off under her breath as the kid, Ahlbi, continued on. By now, Klavier had learned to tune him out. The kid was cute, yeah, and he knew a lot about Khura’in, but he didn’t know the meaning of ‘brief’. Klavier could have walked around the entire Kingdom twice in the amount of time he’d spent listening to their guide.

“Extravagant,” Klavier finished for her, and she chuckled.

“Coming from you, that’s saying something.”

“Well, you know,” Klavier turned to her with half a grin. “Speaking as an expert…”

“I suppose,” she sighed. “That’s insane, though.”

“You’re telling me,” he muttered. Ahlbi’s dog left his master’s side to follow a trail of sniffles through the courtyard, and Klavier grinned at him. He sniffled at a group of flowers before pouncing on it.

“And it’s here that Phoenix Wright, an attorney from the United States, began the legal revolution in Khura’in.”

Klavier’s ears perked up and his head snapped back to Ahlbi. Phoenix Wright? A pit formed in his stomach; wherever Herr Wright was leading, he knew who was to follow—

“—which Apollo Justice, our very first legal defense attorney in over a decade, finished.”

Ah, yes.

He bit his lips together and forced himself to stay focused on the courthouse. Don’t show your
reaction. Don’t do it. He’s just another guy.

“In fact! Mr. Wright’s first appearance in our legal hall was to defend me, of all people!”

That caught Klavier’s full attention, and his head whipped around to stare at the kid. *If he knows Herr Wright, then he must know—maybe he can get Apollo to—*

Stop it! He thought, forcing down the torrent of emotions that flooded into the back of his head. Damn, he was too sober for this. A part of his brain tried pointing out the three drinks he’d had before leaving his hotel room.

He pointedly ignored that section of gray matter.

Ahlbì continued his—lengthy—description of the legal revolution from the beginning. Feeling a thrumming in the heel of his hands, Klavier sunk his molars into the side of his tongue and bit down hard. He glared at the building for a moment before turning his attention back to the dog, who yipped at a small creature hopping through the stems. If he just tuned out the tour at this point, maybe…

There was movement out of the corner of his eye, and he looked back up at the courthouse to see two people emerge from inside. One was short; she couldn’t have been older than a teenager, yet she was attended by at least five guards and servants, and carried herself with an air of…well, a brat, he figured.

*Speaking as an expert,* he sighed, watching the girl march with a staff in her right hand. Her pink dress almost disappeared under the cape she wore when she turned around to face the person behind her, her black hair whipping around a moment later. Klavier blinked; he’d seen pictures of her, hadn’t he? He stared for a moment, trying to see if the person behind her—

They stepped into the sunlight, which reflected off their snowy white hair as if it were a mirror. They wore it twisted into a long braid over their shoulder. Klavier absentlìy raised an eyebrow, wondering how long it was when not styled. Their clothes, which were also white, were a stark contrast against the dark entryway of the courthouse.

The two stopped and spoke for a moment before the girl turned on her heel and began moving again. Ahlbì, who had, by now, noticed the two, gasped.

“Oh my goodness!” He covered his mouth and pressed his fingers together in front of himself again, recreating the bow he’d offered to the group on their first meeting. Klavier watched the two move away from the courthouse and through the garden in front for a moment before he turned his attention back. If people were leaving, then, maybe, just maybe…

An elbow in his side distracted him, and he turned to see Betsy mimicking Ahlbì’s pose.

“That’s the Queen, you idiot,” she hissed. “You should bow if you don’t want Dee to kill you later!”

Feeling the blood rush from his face, Klavier scrambled to adopt the pose himself. He watched out of the corner of his eye until Ahlbì straightened and continued speaking…something or other about the Queen and the prosecutor with whom she’d been.

He listened with half an ear, feeling his eyes trail back to the courthouse. *A prosecutor, huh?* He thought, glancing at the retreating figures.

He frowned. There was one missing…
The white-haired one had stopped in their tracks, and had their eyes fixed on the group. They stood, motionless, letting the wind slightly tousle their hair and the tenne scarf around his shoulders. Klavier blinked at them.

*Do they know me?*

*Do they hate me?*

*Has... has Apollo talked about me?*

He meant to turn back to the courthouse, but found himself transfixed by the figure. He wasn’t sure how long he stood there, staring at them, but it wasn’t until a deep *ahem* came from behind him that Klavier jumped, a small yelp breaking through his facade.

“Herr Samurai!” He gasped when he landed back on earth, leaning his hands on his knees and placing a hand over his heart. It kept pounding in his chest despite his attempts to calm himself. “Fuck, don’t scare me like that! You’re as bad as that bird!”

Simon stood over Klavier, a slight grin pulling his lips up to the side. He hadn’t meant to startle Gavin, but…

Well. When the opportunity presents itself…

“They’re gone!” Klavier said, and Simon turned his attention back to where the Sad Monk had been.

“Who?” He asked.

“That-! Person!”

“Ah. Sad Monk. Yeah.”

Klavier’s head whipped around and he blinked at Simon. “Explain, please?” Simon shrugged and stuffed his hands further into his pockets.

“We met in court.”

Klavier blinked. “You mean you prosecuted a case with them?”

“Not quite.”

“Then you were the defendant?”

“Nonsense.”

“They were the defendant?”

“No.”

Klavier blinked. “That only leaves two places for you, Herr Samurai, and one of them—,”

“It was to save the soba shop,” Simon rolled his eyes. “If you were ever wondering what it’s like behind the defense bench, it’s the same exact as the prosecution’s bench.”

Klavier stared at him for a moment, fixating him with a skeptical look as he straightened. “That’s...”
“Anyway. Are you coming?” Simon nodded toward the tour, which was slowly leaving them behind. Klavier watched them for a moment. A distinct feeling of obligation struck him, but at the same time...

The world wouldn’t end if he waited for Herr Forehead here…would it?

“Do I have to?” Klavier asked, looking up at Simon, who raised an eyebrow at him.

“You don’t have to do anything,” Simon shrugged. A moment of silence stretched between them, and Simon turned to take in the courthouse again. Klavier sighed. *If he’s not coming out now, he probably won’t be any time soon.* He liked Apollo, and the thought of seeing him again made his stomach flip, but…the man could sure take his time when he wanted to. “I don’t think he’s coming out anytime soon.”

Klavier’s head turned at that. He could feel his cheeks turn red. “What’s that supposed to mean?”

“Justice,” Simon didn’t turn to face him. “If he’s in there, he’s probably speaking with a client. Or five.”

Pouting, Klavier turned back to the building. It was all he could do to not stick his lip out. “I know.”

Simon let the silence drag on between them again, and Klavier could feel the question rise before it came out of his mouth. “Klavier…”

“Herr Samurai,” Klavier shut his eyes. “If you’re going to talk to me about whatever problem you think I have, you should save your breath.”

Simon stiffened, but kept his face neutral. *Dammit*, Klavier hated when he did that.

“That wasn’t actually what I was going to ask you about,” Simon finally turned to face him.

“Good.”

“I was going to ask you about Kristoph.”

Klavier’s breath caught in his throat. His knees, which he’d assumed were solid underneath him, suddenly felt weak. His hands, which he’d folded in his kangaroo pocket, clenched into fists so quickly that a piece of skin ripped off between two of his fingers. Shoulders tense, he forced himself to tear his eyes away from the courthouse and look up at the man next to him, though it felt much less like a swift motion. He wasn’t sure what he’d see there; a part of his brain was *convinced* that when he came to his destination, he’d see his brother. For half a second, he could *see* Kristoph’s favored periwinkle suit, and his stomach twisted.

Luckily, when he saw the man next to him, it was still Blackquill. Either he hadn’t noticed the mental earthquake he’d caused, or he chose not to show any remorse for it. Feeling much like he’d been electrocuted, Klavier shuddered. *A little heads up would have been nice!*

“Why?” He rasped, and Simon finally blinked.

“There’s something in there that still bothers you about it,” Simon continued as if nothing was wrong. He opened his mouth, but Klavier shook his head.

“Right, because I’m supposed to be okay with my brother being a psychotic criminal, right?” He snapped.
Simon sighed. “That’s not what I meant.”

“Of course not.”

“I meant,” Simon pressed on, “that if you talked to someone about it, it might help.”

“And who am I supposed to talk to?” He glared up at the man. “I don’t think you understand how frustrating it is to hear someone say ‘I completely understand’, Herr Samurai.” He turned away. “I am so fucking sick of hearing people say they understand when they never met the man.”

Simon bit his lips together, but Klavier wasn’t done.

“Either that, or they say they understand when they only knew him after he snapped. Which, I’ll never know if he ever acted normal again because he wouldn’t let me see him. Do you know how much that hurts?” He rolled his eyes. “What am I saying? Of course you don’t.”

“I—,”

Klavier held up his hand. “Don’t even try. Please. I don’t want to hear it today.”

Something boiled within Simon, and he stepped forward. “You don’t understand, Gavin—,”

Whirling to him, Klavier stuck his finger into the man’s chest. “No you don’t understand, Simon fucking Blackquill,” his voice grew louder as he annunciated the three words by stabbing his finger into Simon’s pectoral. He might have had to stand on his tiptoes to see him face to face, but in that moment, Klavier didn’t care. Simon was going to listen to him, dammit. “I have lived in my brother’s shadow for my whole life, and the moment he’s in trouble, and I tried to help him, he slapped me away like I had the plague. And the further from him I get, the more fucked up I realize our relationship was, so excuse me if I don’t always want to talk about it.”

Simon blinked at him; the words he wanted to say—that he’d meant to say at the beginning of their conversation, had vanished from his mind. Klavier returned back to his normal height and crossed his arms tightly over his chest.

“You all act so like him, did you know that? ‘Klavier, do this, Klavier, don’t drink so much, Klavier, you’ll rot your brain out—!’” He shuddered and cringed, his arms uncrossing and hands turning into claws on either side of his head. Fuck, he was too sober for this. He finally snapped his head back up, and his arms fell slack at his sides. Simon blinked at him, his brain short-circuiting in that moment.

“I’m sorry, you’re saying we act like him?” He snapped, and Klavier swept his arm in front of himself.

“You all act so like him, did you know that? ‘Klavier, do this, Klavier, don’t drink so much, Klavier, you’ll rot your brain out—!’” He shuddered and cringed, his arms uncrossing and hands turning into claws on either side of his head. Fuck, he was too sober for this. He finally snapped his head back up, and his arms fell slack at his sides. Simon blinked at him, his brain short-circuiting in that moment.

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“I’m sorry, you’re saying we act like him?” He snapped, and Klavier swept his arm in front of himself.

“Of course you all fucking do!” He started yelling, now, the anger in his lungs boiling over. “You try and control what I do, where I go, what I say, like I’m a fucking child—,”

“Because you’re acting like a child!” Simon didn’t have to raise his voice to make Klavier cringe back; the ire in his hiss did enough. “Look at you! You’re throwing a tantrum in public because a friend is worried about you!”

“If you want to be my friend, then be my friend!” Klavier didn’t lower his voice. A few passing tourists moved to the other side of the road. “Listen to me, have some empathy for what I’m trying to feel—,”

“I can’t listen to you if you don’t fucking talk to me!” Simon finally yelled, throwing his arms in the
Klavier’s mouth, already open to continue, snapped shut, and they stared at each other in a tense standoff. He bit his lips tightly together, finally feeling the stares of the people around him. He opened his mouth again, but Simon shook his head.

“Just forget it, okay?” He crossed his arms over his chest and turned back to the courthouse. “I don’t even know why I’m bothering right now, you’ve been avoiding the issue for months and I don’t know why I thought I could make you face it.” Klavier’s face turned red hot as his temper flared. His lungs burned with suffocated words, one demanding to let it out, and the other admitting it was easier to accept the berating. He watched as Simon turned on his heel and stalked away. The lump in his throat almost choked him as he tried swallowing it against the hot tears burning the backs of his eyes.

Wait, a part of him thought, weakly. It was the part of his brain he’d been trying to drown out for months, now. Wait. No. That’s not how I wanted this to go—

“You can’t just avoid your issues, Klavier.” Kristoph’s voice chided him in his head. “You can’t just avoid your issues. You can’t just avoid your issues, you can’t—,”

An exasperated growl tore its way through his throat, and he wheeled around, storming in the opposite direction Simon had gone.

I’m too sober for this, he decided, stuffing his hands deep into his pockets and hunching his shoulders. He just hoped a picture of him standing there, dumbfounded, wouldn’t end up on a gossip magazine cover at the end of the week.

If there were one thing Klavier knew how to do with sobriety, it was how to get rid of it. Lately, it’d been harder to accomplish that goal, but by the time Simon charged offstage during their first set in Khura’in, he had the buzz he’d been chasing for the past few hours. Unlike the last time he and Simon had fought, he’d done everything possible to avoid the man. Not that he was scared of Blackquill, no, but…

Well, there were a few things that just weren’t Simon’s business. And that was that.

If Simon could have a boundary for what Klavier could talk about, Klavier could have a boundary for what Simon could talk about.

Klavier handed off his guitar to the stagehand as Jack started the next song, and took a long pull on the drink he’d set behind his amplifier. It was a slow song they’d recorded for their first album, but hadn’t performed until quite recently. Klavier had wanted to keep it locked away for good, if he were telling the truth, but…well, if they were in Khura’in, and if these people wanted a performance, they’d get a performance.

He’d written the song right after Kristoph’s arrest, but had waited to put music to it until after he’d received the death sentence. To him, it had always been his answer to what Kristoph had done. The pain, the hurt, the anger he’d left in his wake, that he’d manipulated Klavier into inflicting…dammit, he wanted to believe that what he’d done wasn’t his fault, but…

He leaned heavily on the microphone stand and started singing the first verse, his eyes closing. He’d
yet to make it through the song in rehearsals without seeing his brother behind his eyelids, but if he were going to nail the pulls in the chorus, he needed to focus. The song, slow, heavy, and extremely personal, felt…different onstage.

The crowd actually sang it back to him. At least, the first few people in the crowd. He only noticed through glances and peeks, but when he saw it…well, he felt something shift inside of him.

When they’d first discussed performing this song, he’d figured it would be an instant mood killer. It had been written in one of Klavier’s darkest times, right after the execution.

If he shut his eyes, he could remember that feeling. Sitting in his apartment, watching the sun rise and set from his chair. He’d gone weeks without washing his hair then. Herr Edgeworth had given him a few weeks for grief leave, but when he’d needed to return…he’d hoped that the office would ignore his unkempt hair, tired eyes, and wrinkled clothes.

They hadn’t.

That had only driven him further down the drain. His scorching hot showers had all but crisped his hair under the stress. He remembered the emptiness, the anger boiling inside of him. He’d been so angry throughout all of Kristoph’s imprisonment that, once the sentence was carried out, he couldn’t feel anything at all. It was as if all his emotions had bled away through his tears, leaving him a numb outline of a man. Even now, when he let himself fit back into that sadness, the hollowness returned. As he moved with the words, it was like he was watching himself from a different perspective.

The botched cases he’d worked hadn’t helped. Every time he’d picked up a piece of evidence, he’d seen Kristoph’s face that night he’d warned Klavier about Herr Wright. He’d seen the heartbreak in little Trucy Gramarye’s eyes whenever he met with a witness, and no matter how hard he’d tried drowning out his brother, he felt his presence around every corner. What had angered him the most was the knowledge that the people he met with, the evidence he held, wasn’t Kristoph. Logically, he could understand that. His heart, however…

Even now, it picked up its hammering in his chest. It had been like that for hours now, the same feeling of his stomach dropping to his knees returning every time he let himself think about Blackquill.

The man was insanely bad at masking his discomfort, if Klavier looked hard enough. In the past, he’d caught Simon cringing away from him, or staring just a bit too long, standing a bit too close (or far away)…and now he wanted to talk about Kristoph.

What a bastard, Klavier thought. Jack whined into the guitar solo to his right, and Klavier took a step away from the microphone and ran his hands through his styled hair. First he never wants to talk about his feelings and now he won’t shut up about mine?

“He’s such a hypocrite!” Klavier stilled his flailing hands by gripping the chair in front of him with white knuckles. It was everything he could do not to throw it to the ground. Dee sat on the bed with her laptop half closed; she’d knocked on the door only ten minutes earlier, and after Klavier had suffered through the same judgment from her that he’d received from Simon, she’d planted herself on his bed and simply told him to ‘spill’. Klavier had slept most of the day away, but Dee had insisted that they talk about the new album. At first he’d refused; the three-day long party had left him with a massive hangover.

It had also left them three days behind in planning for the release. In the end, he’d relented, but so far she’d yet to say one word about it. She had stopped clacking away at her laptop when the name ‘Kristoph’ had come out of his mouth. Dee had been there after the Gramarye trial; she hadn’t seen
Kristoph’s influence on Klavier the same way Daryan might have, but she still understood that, when Klavier Gavin brought up his brother’s name, the best thing to do was to listen. “He goes on and on about how I need to talk to someone about what I’m feeling, yet he doesn’t want to talk to anyone about the PTSD he obviously has!”

“You don’t know he’s got PTSD,” Dee interjected, and Klavier turned over his shoulder to her.

“The man spent seven years in prison, Frau,” he rolled his eyes at her. “I’d be surprised if he didn’t.”

“That’s not the point, anyway,” she shook her head. “Klav, you were gone for a long time. We’re just…a little worried about you.”

“As you’ve brought up many times before,” Klavier rolled his eyes. “But Dee, I’m fine.”

She raised an unimpressed eyebrow. “I’d be more inclined to believe that had you not just disappeared for a few days.” Klavier sighed and turned away from her. He finally let go of the chair and crossed his arms back over his chest. His nap had been too short, and she’d entered before he could quiet the pounding in his head. “I’m not trying to accuse you of anything, Klav. I’m just…”

“Worried, ja, I know,” he huffed, taking a few steps around the chair and collapsing into it. “Look, I…I’ll be okay. I just…think Jack needs to go.”

Dee blinked at him. “Jack?”

“He sets me off, Dee,” Klavier leaned forward, lacing his fingers together in front of himself. “He…brings out the Gavin in me.” She inclined her head as if to prod him on, and he bit his lips together. “The…Kris in me.”

Dee opened her mouth in a silent ‘oh’ and nodded. Her laptop clicked as she shut it, and she removed it from her lap. “And…you think if we replace him, things will get better?”

“I don’t know,” Klavier buried his face in his hands. “I just…if it’s between him and Herr Samurai, I’d rather go through a million guitarists.”

“You could talk to Simon.”

Klavier snorted.

“I’m serious,” Dee sat a little straighter, her voice dropping in disappointment. “Klav. I think you two are the closest you each have at friends right now—,”

Klavier’s head snapped up. “Are you saying we aren’t friends?”

Dee let out a long sigh and rolled her eyes. “I’m saying that you two have got…something going on. And I’m not the only person to think this. You know how many reporters have asked if you’re dating?”

Now it was Klavier’s turn to roll his eyes.

“Don’t you roll your eyes at me,” she snapped, crossing her arms over her chest.

“You just don’t understand,” Klavier muttered, shaking his head. She paused, as if waiting for him
to continue. When he didn’t, she inclined her head to him.

“Then try to explain it to me,” she said quietly, and Klavier’s head shot back up. His eyes were red, and Dee felt her chest ache. “Please?”

“He’s got his own shit to work through,” Klavier’s voice, hoarse from dehydration, sobriety, and emotion, almost cracked. His lips puckered out as he gnawed at the inside of his cheek. Dee let him keep thinking, but watched as his eyes moved from one point in the room to another, as if he were watching trains of thought connect. “I don’t think he’s ready to take on someone else’s shit.”

“Ohay,” she spread her hands. “So when he is ready—,”

“I just don’t know if he’ll ever be ready, Dee,” Klavier said. “Right now, he feels more like a babysitter than an actual band member. You all do.”

She pressed her lips together at that, nodding slightly. He’d meant to phrase it better, less accusatory, but taking it back would feel…wrong. Trying to cover it with ‘I didn’t mean that’ would just be lying. He swallowed the pit in his throat and looked away, taking a deep breath to gain his bearings.

“I didn’t mean it to sound like that,” he whispered, but his voice was thick. When he turned back to her, he could see her eyes tighten. “I just need to feel like I can talk to you all on my own time.”

She nodded. “That’s all well and good, Klav, but when your own time makes you disappear for days on end and brings you on a bender like this…?” She gestured to the room. “It makes me think you need a little nudge in the right direction.”

Betsy crashed into the end chorus with the final drum fill of the guitar solo, and Klavier seized the microphone again. He leaned further down into the crowd, half spitting and half belting his soul to the world. As much as he loved Simon’s voice, and how much he appreciated the man’s talent, there were some songs he’d written that were just…too personal to be sung by another.

On cue, near the end of the chorus, Klavier turned around to face Betsy, who continued driving the song forward, and dunked his head into the bucket at the base of the platform. He’d started requesting it there to undo his hair midway through the set; as much as he loved the style, the frail strands were starting to protest against the constant abuse.

He pulled himself back up, water dripping from his chin, nose, and hair, and turned back to the crowd.

The lights in front of him went out, leaving only the white lights behind Betsy. A slight hush fell over the crowd. He took in a deep breath and held the microphone back up.

Klavier threw his head back and tightened his stomach muscles. Water went flying as the last note of the song tore itself out of his body. Rhys, Jack, and Stein held their final chords until Betsy came down on the crash cymbals again. When their instruments silenced, the lights behind Betsy extinguished.

The crowd howled their approval.

In the darkness, Klavier let his arm fall. For the moment, he kept his eyes closed. He could hear the stagehands moving his bucket of water away, handing Jack a different guitar, and towing two stools onto the stage for Blackquill’s return. That was all well and good, he knew, but he couldn’t get himself to move. In the back of his head, he knew that Simon and Dee were right.

He stood, taking in the approval, the admiration, the joy he brought out in others. A part of him knew, had always known, that he worked so hard at his music to try and gain the approval he’d
wanted so badly from his brother, though he’d run from that truth for so long.

In that moment, he let himself relax into the sound of metalheads cheering on his misery.

Only to realize how tired of running he was.

“Are you okay?” A voice came from his side, and Klavier turned to see Rhys standing next to him, retuning his bass. Klavier blinked at him, as if waking from a dream. He blinked at the rest of the stage, where Simon took his place on his stool.

The exhaustion soaking through his bones threatened to hold him in place there, but he forced himself forward nonetheless. Simon shot him a look over his shoulder, and Klavier let out a sharp breath.

Klavier shot Rhys a rockstar grin and pushed the thought away. “Peachy,” he muttered, sitting behind the taller man. The bassist strummed a chord on his guitar, lulling the audience out of the next song and setting the key for the next. Klavier let himself be lulled, feeling himself come out of the headspace from the last song.

After a few more chords, Rhys dropped out, and Simon sang the first line of the song. The crowd erupted into excited cheers. He bit his smile back, taking his comfortable place a third above the baritone voice in his harmony.

He felt the energy he’d lost in the last song returning to him, and he couldn’t help but steal a glance at the crowd. In a way, he was happy that they’d come to Khura’in. He’d be hard pressed to admit it out loud, but…

A part of him knew, intrinsically, there was only one person with which he’d feel safe talking about his problems.

And if he didn’t see Apollo on the tour…well…

Maybe he’d stop running from Simon and Dee.

Chapter End Notes

To paraphrase my beta reader ’Aww, it looks like things are getting better!...why are there still so many chapters left tho?"
Bullfight

Chapter Summary

Makes you think, did I ever know you at all?
Follow until I fall,
Vultures circling the sun, the sun, the sun...

Chapter Notes

Hoo boy, time for a long chapter! This one took...a lot out of me. A lot. I haven't really come out and said much about where this is coming from, but a lot of it comes from personal experience (kind of, I haven't been to jail or been a prosecutor, or in a metal band) and in general, it's all things I've felt, seen, or been told in the height of my abuse, and the recovery afterward. Yeah. Don't really have many other details besides that, but...it's kinda like the 'hey! you look tired!' 'thanks, it's the insomnia' meme.
A few commenters have noted that sometimes they gotta wait a few days before they're in the right headspace to read this, and I totally get that. if the updates take a while, it's because I'm trying to get in the right headspace to write it.
That being said, thank you all so much for the love and views; writing this and sharing it has helped me process through a lot of my own traumas, and having you all along for the ride means so much to me. I might be too sad most days to get back to your comments, but please please please know that they are all read and I have screenshots of many of them on my phone for a day when I'm particularly down.
Anyway! That's enough of MY sadness! Let's move on to someone else's sadness!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

“Hey, Klavier,” a voice came from behind him, and Klavier jumped. He turned his head to see Stein standing in the doorway back into the venue. Their opening band for the second show in Khura’ın started in an hour, and they had just arrived back at the scene as the doors were opening. Klavier had moved through the hallway quickly, diving in between stagehands and gophers. He’d grabbed a beer from one before stepping into the alleyway. The vantage point was perfect for watching people enter the doors, and up until Stein had poked his head out, he’d been watching the Khura’inese flow inside. Dee hadn’t lied when she said they had killed sales in Khura’in. He’d doubted, at first, but when he’d seen the line waiting for doors, he’d had to admit he was wrong.

Which was bitter enough already. Having Stein find him out here, well…

I don’t even know why I’m so concerned, he thought, taking a swig from his drink. I’m practically a hop and a skip away from Herr Forehead. I could just…go see him.

Somehow, he knew, that wouldn’t satisfy him the way Apollo coming to see them would. Maybe if I get over myself and text him, put a ticket or two on will call…
“You okay?” Stein interrupted him, and Klavier blinked back into the world. He swallowed the beer in his mouth. The bricks of the building on which he was leaning scratched his arm as he leaned into it, weighing the question. To Stein, it was probably an easy question to ask. Klavier just wished it was easy to answer.

Growing up with Kristoph, ‘are you okay’ had always meant at least five different things to Klavier.

First, it had meant ‘Are you done?’ If he was acting out. Kristoph had asked it with an aloof tone, nostrils flared and eyes veiling the rage he must have been feeling inside.

Second, it had meant ‘You won’t tell anyone, right?’ If Kristoph had yelled at him. Klavier hadn’t heard this one nearly as much as the first, but every once in a while, when he pushed his brother too far, he remembered facing the question with a pounding pulse.

Third, it had meant ‘I can see you’re angry, but I want you to be done. So will you shut up?’ The apathy behind the question had usually only served to anger Klavier more, but as much as he wished he’d been brave enough to stand up to Kristoph, he knew that he’d only walked away with his tail between his legs upon reaching that tone.

Fourth, and much rarer, was the ‘Are you hurt?’ question. He remembered getting that question a lot more when he was little, before he’d learned the first three meanings for it. As they’d grown, he’d taken care of any cuts or bruises before Kristoph could see. Mostly, if not only, so that he could avoid a lecture.

Lastly, and the most rare, it had meant what it asked. ‘Are you okay?’ Usually, from Kristoph, came when Klavier had been overtired, overworked, or stressed about school. Since Klavier had graduated so early, he’d heard that version less and less as he’d become more and more the person he was today.

Then, of course, he heard it from people around him. Generally, ‘Are you okay’ from others was meant to really ask him if he was safe, or happy, or anything like that.

So the mental gymnastics Klavier had to go through after being asked such a question usually left his mind wheeling. He’d learned, in his adolescence, to grin, say ‘ja, I’m great,’ and move on. It hadn’t been until recently, touring with Simon and Dee again, that they had stopped him and added that sixth meaning to the question. In his experience, he’d always thought that the last ‘are you okay’ only existed for book characters, or people in love.

Since he was decidedly not in love with Simon and Dee, and they were decidedly not in love with him, he’d had to rethink his entire idea of the question. Judging by the look on Stein’s face, he figured that the keyboardist meant what he asked. He hadn’t been doing much when Stein had found him, and the man had yet to do anything to him. Klavier also hadn’t been speaking, so there was no way it came as a reaction to a tantrum, and Klavier wasn’t obviously bleeding anywhere. He shot a look down to his inner elbow, but the needle pricks had long faded from his last extreme bender. Sure, he’d downed a few pills to make his day easier, but it wasn’t anything too dramatic. It wasn’t like he needed them to survive, he just…well, he’d been thinking a lot more about Kristoph, lately, and his dreams would somehow brought him back to his brother, and…

“I’m fine,” Klavier finally decided on his reply with a raised eyebrow. Stein returned the look, then glanced beyond Klavier to the crowd beyond him.

“Looking for someone?” He asked.

“No,” Klavier said, a little too quickly. Stein’s other brow shot up on his forehead, but Klavier
shook his head and pushed away from the building. He forced himself not to look back at the crowd. It was bad enough that Simon knew he’d been looking for Apollo yesterday. He’d caught him in almost the same position, but had been much less forgiving. “No, I just didn’t believe Dee when she said we were a hit here.”

That seemed to appease the man, and he smiled. “Yeah, you could say that.”

“Did you need something?”

Stein blinked, as if he’d completely forgotten why he’d interrupted Klavier’s alone time, and then jammed his thumb over his shoulder, back inside. “The contest winners are here for their meet and greet.”

Right. Contest winners. Meet and greet.

“Ach, yes,” he nodded, finishing the beer in his hand and tossing it into the recycling behind him. “Let’s not keep the fans waiting any longer, ja?”

“Ja,” Stein grinned at him, standing aside to let Klavier through.

He pushed down the foolish hope that he’d recognize the contest winners, and stepped inside.

Facing-forward Simon had done more for the band than anything Dee could have planned, Klavier decided. Not only did he have the confidence Klavier had been trying to teach him for years, but he knew how make the crowd cheer with a simple point.

Which made him eternally grateful that the man had never pointed in the courtroom. Tried to draw his katana, yes, throw feathers, yes, but point? Klavier hadn’t seen him try that. The first time he’d tried it, Simon had stared at his hand with an almost reverent look, and the grin that had spread across his face had been unmistakable. Since then, he’d flexed his newfound superpower whenever he could. The insane part about it, the part that would always make Klavier grin, was that it always worked. Even during the applause and cheering after a song, all it took was a point from Simon and it would move from appreciative to downright ecstatic. His face spread wide in that unmistakable grin of his whenever it happened, and Klavier found it so contagious that he always had to join in that grin. He’d never seen Blackquill so—well, not happy, Klavier wasn’t actually sure what that looked like, but—content in his life. Simon grinned, nodded along with the crowd, and jammed out to the music onstage now.

Klavier grinned just at the thought of it; who would have thought that Simon Blackquill, former convicted criminal, the Twisted Samurai, was a born musician. Klavier certainly hadn’t known what to do with the information, and now? Now he was running their shows like he’d suddenly become an expert overnight.

Klavier watched him from the corner of his eye, facing the back of the stage as he started the riff for their next song. The change had been perfectly timed, despite everything. The longer he stayed on tour, the more he retreated back into his old habits, and the more he wanted to focus solely on the music.

That, and as much as he wanted to say he was getting better, it was becoming harder and harder to keep thoughts of his brother at bay. The current song didn’t help. He’d written it a long time ago,
even before Kristoph’s arrest, but had never liked his voice for it. In fact, he’d been a few months away from selling the damn thing before he came across Simon. Betsy let him vamp on the riff for a while so that Simon could grab some water, but Klavier didn’t mind. Once Jack started in with him, Klavier was able to ad lib for a few bars.

Klavier’s attention turned from Simon to Jack, and he watched the man ease into the comfortable rhythm. He’d just finalized their replacement guitarist to fly to their next destination; he’d had Dee contact each of the other members to have a meeting with her and Klavier between the second and third shows.

They’d meet with Jack after the third show.

It felt underhanded, sure, to go behind his back, but at this point, Klavier wasn’t sure what else to do. He hadn’t acted out lately, not necessarily, but…

There was a difference between acting out and purposely separating oneself from a group. A part of him didn’t mind, really; the further Jack withdrew from the band, the less time Klavier had to spend with him.

On the other hand…

He remembered the pit in his stomach well. He’d spent his entire life with that pit. At first, he’d ignored it, it was so familiar to him.

It was like an old boot. At first, when you take it out of the box, it might hurt. You realize it’s too small for your foot, or that it gives you blisters. Then, after a few weeks, or months, or years, you get calluses. The calluses protect your feet from being hurt as bad by the boots. Sure, you can still get hurt, but the hurt is a lot less prominent, and it’s easier to ignore. Then, once it’s completely broken in, your feet get used to them. In fact, they start feeling comfortable.

It isn’t until you’re introduced to a new pair of boots that you realize how badly the other ones fit.

Even then, the new boots feel uncomfortable; you’re used to the same pain from your other boots, so you keep expecting it, but when it never comes…well…

Either your foot gets better, or you get another pair of boots like the old ones.

In Klavier’s case, the boots no longer support him.

The pit was a lot like the pair of old boots. It fit in his stomach the way he remembered it, he’d already broken it in so it didn’t squeak when he walked, and he could feel the miles he’d walked in it like it was stepping into an old memory. Working with—well, essentially living with—Jack, Klavier had always felt like something was coming. He was never sure what, or when, or where, but that something was about to happen. He could never expect it like he wanted, nor could he pinpoint what he expected, but…

He was just waiting for the other shoe to drop.

Living with Kristoph, trying to navigate through the insane web that was his personality, his life… Klavier had learned to always expect something bad to happen. It could have been a gorgeous day, or he could have solved the biggest case, but he’d always had an inkling that something was about to go insanely wrong. It only took a text, a look, or even some silence, and Klavier would know that he was in trouble. Even if Kristoph hadn’t said anything specifically, Klavier was expected to just know he was in the wrong.
Deep down, he knew that’s what had killed him so much about Kristoph’s refusals. The silence had eaten him right down to his core. He’d pressed on, pretending like waiting for the shoe to drop wasn’t eating him inside. The execution had mostly taken care of his anxious anticipation, and he’d been able to move on.

Move on, at least, from the pit that had now snuck its way back into his stomach.

Sure, Klavier’s time away from Kristoph hadn’t been long, but he’d grown accustomed to walking with well-fitting boots, and this feeling of Kristoph—Jack, it was Jack this time, not Kristoph—looming over his shoulder hurt. He wasn’t sure if it would fix all of his problems, but he was ready to try.

Now, as Simon stepped back up to the microphone and Klavier joined Jack in the main riff of the song, Klavier let himself actually feel the anger that threatened to burn a hole through his organs and fall writhing to the stage like a hot sack of rats.

The heavy angst anthem had ripped apart the back of his mind for so long, and to hear it now, in front of the hundreds of people packed inside the venue, he felt…conflicted. He’d never been particularly fond of the song. He’d written it just to get the feeling off his chest, and…

The feeling he’d had the night before, of baring his soul to the world…no matter how hard he searched for it, he couldn’t find it. Simon continued the verse with a precision Klavier could only find in a few musicians, but it did very little to assuage him of the fact that he’d rather have kept the song to himself. It felt wrong to play it now. His head pounded against the rhythm; the longer he listened, the longer he played, the more his blood boiled and his molars ground against one another. Out of the corner of his eye, he could see Dee watching him, her arms crossed tightly over her chest and frowning.

He let out a sharp breath and turned away from her, swinging his body back around to face the audience. He wouldn’t have a breakdown in the middle of their show. He was Klavier Gavin, for goodness’ sake, and he did not have breakdowns.

Well, not publicly, at least.

Tears stung the back of his eyes when Simon barreled into the chorus. Shit, he could still feel the anger he’d channeled in his pen while writing those words. A part of him still felt the angry, scorned wound that pulsed with every beat. Smiling for the camera whenever it caught he and Kristoph in the same frame. Brushing off questions about his brother with as much poise and precision as a scrambling mind could muster. Silently begging that Kristoph would be asleep when he came home. He could remember it all in that moment.

He could remember it so well, in fact, that his fingers slipped, and he landed on three wrong chords before he pulled himself together. Jack’s head snapped around to stare at him, wide-eyed, and Klavier snarled down at his guitar, turning away from the audience again.

Snap out of it! He thought at himself, watching his fretboard like it would suddenly shift underneath the pads of his fingers again. You’re not with Kristoph! You’re never going to have to deal with him again! He proved that you have nothing to offer him anymore, so stop it! His fingers felt numb against the strings; he could see that he was pressing the right frets, he could see his hand in the right position, but…

His hand moved on its own on three more wrong chords. Simon couldn’t help but look over at Klavier, who gnashed his teeth together and let his hand fall from the neck. It shook in the air next to him, and he stared at it. Stop it. Stop shaking. He thought at it angrily, but despite his best efforts,
his fingers wouldn’t stop twitching. The exhaustion coursing through his head clouded everything else, and he could only stare down at his palm for the rest of the song. Jack had filled in for his solo, and had carried the rest of the song on his own—for which Klavier knew he’d get an earful later, but was grateful nonetheless—and still had his eyes locked on Klavier. Fury radiated off him like an angry, red aura, and as Klavier stared back at him, the familiar pit in his stomach began to rot. The nausea locked him in place until the stagehand gingerly tapped him on the shoulder. He flinched away, finally breaking the staring contest between him and Jack and turning to stare at the woman.

“Your, um, guitar, Mr. Gavin?”

Mr. Gavin.

Mr. Gavin.

I don’t look like him. I’m not him. I’m—

“Klav?” Rhys’ voice brought him out of the moment, and he turned to see him. “Klav, are you okay?”

Betsy had started filling the awkward silence, and luckily, the light technician had turned off the rest of the lights to leave her in the spotlight. Out of the corner of his eye, he saw Simon coming over, and he shook his head.

“Ja, I’m fine,” he muttered, bowing out of his guitar strap and handing it to the stagehand. “I’m just—,”

“You never mess up chords like that,” Rhys continued. “Are you sure?”

“Ich bin fein!” Klavier snapped, pushing past him to his amp, which held the drink he’d ordered mid-set. Simon and Rhys shared a look as he pounded the drink and turned back around. He started forward at him, raising his arms in an unspoken ‘what more do you want?’ pose. Rhys raised his hands in surrender and turned around, but Simon just crossed his arms over his chest and pursed his lips together.

Klavier’s blood ran cold, and he stared at the pose with clenched fists. In that moment, it took everything he had not to reach forward and grab Simon by the shoulders, shaking him to just leave him alone. Instead, he only stalked away from him, taking his place in front of his microphone. He and Simon shared this song, and dammit, he wasn’t going to get into it now.

He’d be fine.

He was Klavier fucking Gavin.

Of course he’d be fine.

Betsy, finishing her solo set, raised her sticks to the cheering crowd in front of Klavier. After the cheering reached its peak, Klavier turned to Jack, who stood with his hands on his hips, watching him. Klavier blinked at him a few times, looking pointedly to the guitar and then back up at him. Jack raised his hands in a ‘what are you doing?’ gesture, and Klavier gave him an exaggerated nod toward the crowd. He made a production of rolling his eyes before hitting the chords for the next song. Klavier let him vamp the chords for a few seconds before hitting his cue. Stein joined in behind them, and Klavier gripped the microphone tightly in order to keep his hands from shaking.

Simon had written the song but insisted that Klavier sing on it. In recompense, he’d agreed to scream and offer his harmonies on the song. Now that he was facing forward, it was much easier to
jam with him as the song went on. At first, Klavier had insisted that he played guitar on it, too, but after hearing Stein fill in for the rhythm guitar, had relented. Now, as he leaned back and forth into the crowd in between Simon’s screams, he remembered seeing the lyrics the first time Simon had handed them to him.

“Das sind großartig,” He’d said to Simon. “They sound so familiar.”

Simon had stayed quiet for a moment after that, as if he were weighing his replies before actually saying them. Klavier had climbed up on the platforms at the front of the stage during the second verse. The bridge mostly favored Simon, and as the man in question climbed up next to him and the song broke down, Klavier let his torso fall back. They’d done the same thing with the song every time they’d perform it; when the beat dropped again in the bridge, Klavier would drop with it in an exaggerated head bang. He rocked his knee to the beat as Betsy moved them closer to the words. In his head, he was still back in his apartment, sitting across the coffee table from Simon and waiting for his reply.

“I can see how they would be,” He’d said, and Klavier had moved on quickly, talking about the feel of the song, an how the lyrics set a perfect stage for the sound—

“You can’t just avoid the issue”—“ Simon screamed into the microphone, and Klavier’s eyes shot open. He stared up at the rafters without fully seeing the lights that bore down on him.

In that moment, he was hurtled back to standing in a similar position across from Kristoph. It had been one of the last few times Klavier had made it a point to come home for Christmas. He’d had to wait for Kristoph for hours on their deck, listening to the happy family downstairs play John Denver’s Greatest Hits three times through before the door had opened. His mood had already soured in the time he’d spent waiting, but Kirstoph’s arrival home, and the re-introduction to his post-work attitude had only incited a fight between them. Klavier could remember sitting on the balcony and just feeling—the feeling he’d grown accustomed to—that he and Kristoph would fight. He hadn’t been sure about what, but his brother would surely find something to nitpick him about.

Of course he’d been right, and the strained peace between them had only lasted an hour before they were screaming at each other. Well, before Klavier was screaming at Kristoph. Klavier had been the first to raise his voice, and he knew—knew that if Kristoph would just emote something, anything, he would have been satisfied enough to admit whatever Kristoph had wanted him to.

Instead, Kirstoph had simply crossed his arms over his chest, pursed his lips, and tilted his head to the side. That had only infuriated Klavier more and he’d thrown his hands in the air, letting them slap back to his thighs. The quiet had stretched on after that. Kristoph’s nostrils had flared in the outburst, but other than that, he’d shown no other emotion. Klavier could remember his chest rising and falling in the excitement of it before Kristoph finally spoke.

“You can’t just avoid your issues, Klavier,” he’d said, venom lacing his voice. Klavier had flinched back at the intensity. “All this time, you should have learned from the things we’ve been through together.”

“You should have learned from the things you’ve been through”—“ Simon screamed, and the words seared through his brain like lightning striking a dying tree.

“Honestly. You haven’t changed since you were a child, and you’ll never learn. You’ll never, ever, know what you have until it’s gone.”

“You don’t know what you have until it’s lost—!”
“I can see how they’d be familiar,” Simon’s voice echoed in Klavier’s head.

Slowly, as if he were made of wood, his head creaked down to stare at Simon, who had leaned back in the vocal pull.

That—

“Till the hammer drops.”

Bastard!

Klavier’s knees gave out underneath him, and he collapsed into a crouch.

Simon’s head snapped over at him. The momentum of Klavier’s fall knocked him sideways. He landed on his backside, legs tucked to the side. He stared forward. The instrumental wasn’t long, but—

There’s no way.

His breath caught in his throat, and he played the words Kristoph had told him so long ago over and over in his head. No. Only he and I were there. There’s no way.

When he finally looked back up at Simon, he could tell.

It’s a coincidence. Just a coincidence.

“I can see how they’d be familiar,” he’d said.

The pinpricks that always preceded tears filled his nose. It was as if the ground could no longer hold him, or any weight. He’d been touring with—living with someone who had known Kristoph. Known him after the breakdown. After the lies. After the Misham trial.

And he’d known him well enough for Kristoph to have told him about that night.

I—

His brain short-circuited, trying to understand the betrayal that had lit his veins on fire. It had hit him so hard that he could only stare up at Simon for a moment, watching as he expertly led the call and response breakdown before the last chorus.

“Brace—fall—brace—fall—brace—fall—brace—fall—”

Why didn’t you tell me, Blackquill?

“Brace—fall—brace—fall—brace—fall—brace—fall—”

The moment passed, and Klavier blinked out of his thoughts, keenly aware of the audience staring up at him. He slammed his eyes shut and hit his cue like nothing had happened, but his voice broke when he tried returning it back to his normal volume.

Stop it, stop it, stop it, he yelled in his head, taking the beat between words to clear his throat and try again. When he came back in, his voice was much stronger, but the unmistakable shake in his tone left him feeling powerless. He’d always used his music to hide his crises, but no matter what he tried, he couldn’t get his body to obey him.

Mercifully, the song ended shortly after, and the lights went out. From what he could remember,
their set was over.

At least, for him, it was over.

He managed to pull himself to his feet and hop off the platform. The lights didn’t come back up, and the crowd started chanting for another song.

_Gut_, he thought to himself. _We’re done. I can’t do another song, I—_

“Klav!” Dee’s voice came from his right, still muffled by his earplugs. He ducked his head, taking in a deep breath to try and suppress the emotions trying to escape.

The deep breath came with a loud sniffle. Dee stopped in her tracks for a moment before she ran after the retreating man, grabbing him by the arm. “Klav, what’s wrong?”

“Leave me alone, Dee!” He yelled, louder than necessary so he could hear himself. He tore his arm away from her.

“The encore—,”

“Fuck the encore!” He finally whirled to her, and she flinched back, drawing her hand to her chest. Klavier’s eyes, ablaze in a tearful rage, glared red at her. “Have them play something Simon sings— Jack should know the parts anyway!” He spun on his heel and continued stalking away, leaving Dee a statue of shock in his wake.

She watched him leave, jaw slack. Sure, she’d seen Klavier like this in the past, but…

She turned on her heel back to the stage. Simon, Rhys, and Stein were standing on the stairs down from the stage, all a mask of angry confusion.

“What’s going on?” Rhys demanded, but Dee waved them back.

“Go play the encore before everyone leaves,” she ordered, marching forward as if they were pigeons that needed to relocate. None of the men moved by the time she reached the base of the stairs. She cursed her short stature, raising an angry finger at them. “I will take care of this, but you all need to go make sure no one knows what just happened!”

Stein and Rhys reluctantly turned and made their way back to the stage, but Simon’s eyes had yet to move from where Klavier had just disappeared. Blessedly, Betsy started one of the songs Klavier didn’t sing, and Dee let out a long sigh. “Simon,” she said as quietly as she could without drawing more attention backstage, “if you know what’s going on, you _know_ he’s only going to get angrier if you don’t finish the fucking set.”

Simon blinked down at her, taking in the short woman. Her curly, kinky hair, as big as it had become in the humid Khura’inese heat, hardly reached his chest when he stood a stair above her, but he knew that if he took one more step away from the stage, she would destroy him.

He’d known for a while, but in that moment, he could truly understand why Klavier was so adamant about working with her. She’d been through the worst years of Klavier’s life with him. The wrinkles in her brown skin were either from her work with the Gavinners or her children.

Deep down, Simon knew that, in her mind, those two were synonymous.

He nodded solemnly to her, replacing his earplug before ascending the stairs back onto the stage.
When she was convinced no one was looking at her, Dee finally let her shoulders fall, and rubbed her forehead.

“I knew the tours were going too well for my own good,” she muttered under her breath.

When the set was finally over, Simon shoved the microphone into its stand and stormed offstage. The stairs creaked as he descended them. Dee had moved by then, and he couldn’t help the knot in his stomach. It twisted and turned on its own, a rotting piece of guilt and fear. He tore out his earplugs as soon as he was far enough away from the roaring crowd, stuffing them into his pockets before using his arms to propel him forward faster. His height had always been a blessing, but now he felt even more grateful for the space it put between himself and the rest of the band as they came down from the stage.

As he strode down the halls back to the dressing rooms, he couldn’t get Klavier’s face out of his head.

He’d looked so…small. So scared. The way he’d stared up at Simon with a mix of betrayal and anger…

Klavier Gavin had surprised him at every step of the way; he’d been everything from an obnoxious, stalking prick to a close, irreplaceable friend, but he’d always had one saving grace to him.

He’d never, ever looked at Simon like that. No matter how many reports he’d heard about the Phantom. No matter how often his time in prison had been brought up. No matter how many times Simon had been asked about the UR-7 incident, Klavier had always treated him like no one else had, despite their best efforts.

He’d never regarded him as a monster, or a mistake, or someone who hadn’t deserved their freedom.

Simon swallowed the lump growing in his throat, forcing the glower on his face to stay in place. When he reached Klavier’s dressing room, he found Dee standing outside, her arms crossed tightly over her chest. She looked up at him with pursed lips, fingers tapping on her arm.

“He just left,” she said quietly, and Simon’s stomach dropped to his feet.

“Where did he go?” He demanded, and Dee let out a long sigh.

“Probably back to the hotel. I’ve called security to keep an eye on his room.”

“Did he take a car?”

“Said he needed some air.”

*That brat,* Simon sighed. “I’ll go after him.”

“Good luck,” she shook her head. “He’s in a nasty mood.”

“I know,” Simon muttered. *I’m the one who put him there.* “I’ll take care of it.”

The sound of the band catching up with him spurred him on, and he pushed the door to the outside world open, entering into the damp, humid night. He stalked out of the alleyway away from the
people waiting outside, legs pumping him forward. His mind raced faster and faster the further he went from the venue, the pit in his stomach twisting his organs in a painful, anxious knot.

*I should have told him sooner,* Simon thought to himself, fists balling at his sides. *I should...should have done something differently.*

His mind raced back and forth with what he was going to say to Klavier. An apology, most likely, but just the thought of that left a rotten aftertaste.

He was in the middle of one train of thought when he passed the alleyway next to the hotel and a crouched figure caught his eye. Stopping in his tracks, Simon blinked, and then took a large step back. There, crouched like a child with his arms wrapped around his knees, was Klavier Gavin. For an agonizing moment, Simon thought he might be crying, but no sobs or whimpers came from the alley.

Simon took a deep breath and stepped toward him.

“F-op-dono.”

Klavier’s head shot up, and he squinted at the sunset behind Simon for a moment before his eyes finally adjusted to the light. Frowning against the harsh light, his eyes slowly made their way up to Simon’s face, and his nose crinkled.

“*Bitte*, Herr Samurai. Not now.” He tucked his head into his knees again.

“Yes, now.”

His shoulders rose and fell in a mirthless laugh, and, shaking his head, Klavier finally looked up at him.

“*Nein*. This should have happened months ago.”

Simon’s throat ran dry. Forcing a solemn “I know,” felt like sandpaper on his windpipes. “I—,”

“Do you know what you said to me the first time you showed me that song?” Klavier continued. “I said the lyrics sounded familiar, and you said that you could see how they would be.” He turned, livid blue flames glaring up at the towering man. Simon felt smaller in that moment than he had in a very, very long time. “*That* is when this should have happened. Not. Now.”

Instinctually, Simon’s mind rebelled against feeling so small, and he shifted his weight from one foot to another. If Klavier lunged at him, he’d be able to sidestep easier. Taking a moment to swallow the lump in his throat, Simon forced the tension out of his shoulders. “I can’t change what I have or haven’t said to you,” he said. “I—I know you must have a thousand questions—,”

“Just one, actually,” Klavier finally leaned back and crossed his arms over his chest, squaring his shoulders at Simon. “All I want to know is why the *f*uck my older brother was allowed to see an inmate like you when he was supposed to be in solitary confinement.” Simon opened his mouth as if to answer right away, but Klavier took a step closer. “No, more than that; I want to know why Kristoph wanted to see you instead of his own *f*ucking brother!” His voice, hardly a whisper, stung Simon’s ears. He couldn’t help the flash in his eyes when he saw Kristoph in Klavier’s place, nor the involuntary step back.

“Trust me, it wasn’t an option for either of us to decline,” Simon shook his head, trying to dismiss the uncanny image in his head.

“Oh, really?” Klavier finally leaned back and crossed his arms over his chest. “Then tell me, what
“exactly were you to each other?”

“I was his counselor, Klavier.”

“His counselor?” Klavier spat. “That’s rich. What, you braided each other’s hair and he told you all about his problems?”

“Not at first—,”

“Don’t tell me you got him to sing campfire—At first?”

“He only started talking after the Misham trial—,”

Klavier’s jaw dropped, his eyes widening. “How long did this go on?”

Simon regarded Klavier with a cool indifference. “I was assigned to him right after he was sentenced. The last time I spoke to him was the night before he was executed.”

“So—so all that time, when he would deny my visits—,”

*Rip the bandaid off,* Simon thought, steeling himself for the reaction. “He said that if he let you see him, it would undo everything he’d built.”

Klavier blinked at him. “What’s that supposed to mean?” His voice was small. As small as Simon felt; maybe even more so.

“He said you were his puppet,” Simon closed his eyes so he wouldn’t have to look at that face anymore. “That he’d been grooming you to take the fall for him, not the other way around. If—if he had to die, he wanted you to, as well.” At that, Klavier’s shoulders fell, and his face cleared. Simon reopened his eyes to see a blank stare on the man. “He predicted that you’d kill yourself in three years. If he saw you—let you have closure—it would all be ruined.”

Klavier took a step back, suddenly feeling weak. His head spun, and try as he might to blink it away, it only grew worse. Before he knew what was happening, his back was up against the brick wall again, and the air was crushed out of his lungs.

“And what, and that I’d be able to live?” Klavier breathed. He turned, eyes wide, to Simon. “And I wouldn’t feel this crushing fear that he’s going to magically come back and ruin everything?”

“He can’t,” Simon said. “He’s—,”

“Dead, I know,” Klavier dug the heels of his hands into his eyes, trying to wrap his head around what he was hearing. When he continued, his voice was thick with tears. “You think that makes it easier, or that’ll make me actually believe he’s gone?” Simon opened his mouth, but Klavier pressed on. He slammed the sides of his fists into the wall behind him. “You think that makes me understand that he can’t hurt me anymore?” He let out a manic laugh. “You know, you’d think, but here he is, right now, just like I always knew he would—,” he fell quiet, staring at his feet. Simon let the moment drag on until he shook his head. “I just—I didn’t expect to be hurt like this from you, Simon.”

Taken aback at that, Simon blinked a few times at him. “You…what?”

“This!” Klavier gestured to the two of them. “I expected you to be better than he was, not acting like you were cut from the same godforsaken cloth!”
Simon’s hackles rose, and his fists curled again. “I’m sorry, what did you just say?”

“This withholding information, making me realize it myself—if that isn’t something he’d do, then I wasn’t his fucking brother!”

Simon’s temper flared, and he stalked forward. “Are you fucking kidding me? Kristoph had no intention of telling you anything.”

“Oh, and you did?” Klavier whirled to him. “You had some plan to tell me, ‘Hey Klavier. Remember that brother that abused you? Yeah, I was his counselor before he died, he wanted some messed up things to happen to you?’”

Simon bit his tongue. “Look. I know I should have said something before, but—“

“You think!?“

“But I’m trying to apologize to you about it now. If you’d listen to me—,”

“No!” Klavier threw his hands in the air. “I’m through listening to you—you think it’s okay to keep this from me?”

“It’s not like you asked about Kristoph!” Simon fumed. “What was I supposed to do, read your mind that you wanted to talk about him? Klavier, I’ve been trying to talk to you about Kristoph for months now!” Klavier bit his lips together, eyes still wild. “You always run away from everything because you’re scared of people hurting you! I thought—foolishly—that there was a bone in you that still wanted to have friends, but every time one of us tries to break through your impregnable wall of emotions, you shove us out without another word!”

Klavier’s mouth opened and shut a few times. Feeling much like a fish out of water, he settled for crossing his arms over his chest and turning away from Simon.

“This entire time, Klavier, I have wanted to say something to you. But between your unending benders, your avoidant personality, and your incessant insistence that everything is fine, you’ve done nothing but tie my hands behind my back.” Feeling calmer, now, Simon let his hands fall to his sides. “I thought we were friends, but a friend doesn’t mistrust anyone who tries to help him.”

“Simon, he was my brother,” Klavier finally turned his head back to him. “My only family left; you really think I wouldn’t want to know this? Dammit man, would it have killed you to just come out and say it?” Simon pursed his lips together.

“I would have—if you and him weren’t so similar,” Simon said without thinking, and when Klavier’s head shot back to him, he shut his eyes against the rage.

“I’m sorry, what?”

“I said you two are incredibly similar,” Simon forced himself to say; it would do nothing for either of them to play dumb. “Oh, don’t look at me like that.”

“Like what?”

“Like you don’t see it yourself!” Simon gestured to Klavier. “Sure, you cut your hair, changed your looks, but you know I’m right. Instead of changing any of the things you hate about yourself, you just bury it under drugs, alcohol, and partying, and call it a personality!”

The words hung in the air for a moment, and Klavier felt like he’d been slapped in the face.
“You refuse to ask for help, you have the same smile he used to get when I’d try to help him… Klavier, I hate to break it to you, but you two share so much more than the same last name.”

Anger flared in his chest, and Klavier squinted back up at Simon. His heart beat wildly in his chest, but he couldn’t feel it; he could only hear (vaguely) its thrumming against his sternum, and feel his bones move. He dug his fingernails into the skin of his upper arms, begging his body to move.

“I…didn’t realize,” he finally forced himself to say, voice quiet and measured. Simon felt his blood run cold. He turned to Simon, head tilted, and smiled. “I’m sorry to have burdened you with memories of my brother.”

Simon opened his mouth to continue, to say something, but Klavier pushed past him, and he turned. “Klavier—,”

“I’ve never known how someone thought you could be a murderer, Simon Blackquill,” Klavier stopped. “Sure, you have your look about you, but I’ve read your files, and I’ve seen your mugshots. I didn’t think your blood ran cold enough, but I’m very quickly learning that I was wrong.”

Simon stiffened, his vision turning red. Every muscle in his body screamed that he could punch Klavier now, and no one would blame him. Blame him, no. Believe him…? A former convict against a metal star in Khura’in?

He settled for shaking his head. “I told you when all this started that if any of it started to feel off, I was out, remember?” He asked, and Klavier froze in his tracks. “Maybe I should leave when you kick Jack out of the band.”

Klavier wheeled around. “You wouldn’t.”

“I would.”

“Why can’t you just admit you were wrong and move on!?” Klavier yelled again.

“I have!” Simon raised his voice. “But this is a two way street, Gavin, and just because people are trying to help you doesn’t mean they’re manipulating you!”

“All anyone ever does is manipulate each other! You’re no different!” He spun on his heel, stalking toward the end of the alleyway.

“You can’t keep running from this, Klavier!” Simon yelled after him, but refused to chase after him again.

“And you can’t control everyone you meet!” Klavier bellowed, taking the turn around the corner to the back door at full speed. Before he could hear Simon’s response, he ripped the door open and stormed inside. The air conditioning in the hallway bit his skin in contrast to the air outside, but the sensation felt great against Klavier’s numb brain. He fumbled with his room key for a moment before finally taking it from his wallet and scanning it on the reader. His room felt bitterly cold, even more so than the hallway, and when he was fully inside he turned and pushed the door shut, too impatient to let it close on its own. Both hands on the door, he let his head fall slack, his chin against his chest.

I can’t—he was wrong— Klavier thought, begging with the mountainous insecurity creeping over his head. I’m not like him. I’m not like him at all. I’ve changed, dammit, I can’t be like him—!

Klavier raised his head. On the back of the door hung a full-length mirror, and he stared into its
As it had happened so many times, his reflection warped, and in his mind’s eye, his hair regrew and his clothes turned from dark performance clothes to the periwinkle suit his mind always pictured Kristoph wearing. His eyes, clouded by wire frame glasses, hid the dark circles that now accompanied Klavier everywhere, no matter how much makeup he used to cover them.

He stared.

The reflection stared back for a moment before its head tilted on its own, and its arms crossed themselves over its chest. A thin smile, the same calculated expression Klavier still had nightmares about, spread across its face.

“I…didn’t realize,” it said. “I’m sorry to have burdened you with memories of my brother.”

Klavier crumpled his elbows bending and hands covering his face.

No matter what he did, he always found himself in the same position.

His words, but Kristoph’s voice.

His movements, but Kristoph’s pose.

His actions, but Kristoph’s puppet.

His life, but Kristoph’s strings.

“Get out of my head!” He screamed, pounding his fists on the closest object.

The mirror shattered around him, the glass shards that didn’t fall to the floor embedding themselves in his skin. The pieces clinked together as they moved. Klavier inhaled sharply at the pain, gripping his hands in the hair he still had and pulling.

There, for the first time in months, Klavier Gavin let himself cry. The tears tore their way out of his chest, and for the first few moments, he wasn’t exactly sure about what he sobbed. The first wave came and went, and in the calm between storms, he stared down at the mess he’d made, trying to keep his brain from listing off every single reason for his feelings. The longer he stared, the more reasons he found. The more reasons he found, the more the numbness in his chest receded.

The more the numbness in his chest receded, the more he hurt.

A voice screamed in his chest, and Klavier slumped to his knees, shaking from the horror that vibrated in his ears. He wasn’t sure how long it lasted, or from where it came, but it paralyzed him in that moment, and he could only stare at the bloody glass in shock.

He dropped to his side, hands numbly covering his face.

Alone, scared, and hollow, Klavier Gavin wept.
their own little fan clubs, but him…? Well, he would always play second fiddle to Klavier Gavin, he figured. He’d signed on knowing this, sure, but he hadn’t realized how big of a shadow the man left. For someone who looked like a shadow of himself, the man could stretch on forever.

He could quit, he figured. Tell off Gavin and Dee one last time and have the final say. Especially after Gavin’s behavior at the concert, he could absolutely quit. His friends had been egging him on to leave for almost a year, but something about that felt…well, it felt like losing, and Jack Maeger was not a loser. He’d spent a lot of his life being a loser, sure, but not anymore. He was part of a famous metal band. He’d never thought he’d actually get here, but he’d be damned if anyone was going to try and make him lose this.

Subconsciously, he knew that it was Gavin that had caused all the ruckus. The man had never, ever had a simple bone in his body. He had to be made of glitter and rhinestones on the inside for all the attention he pulled toward himself. The more Jack thought about it, the more it made sense. A grin tugged at his lips, and he pulled out his phone to send the text to his friends back in the States.

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The bartender gave him a nod as he pulled the stool out and sat, checking his notifications. He briefly looked up from his phone to give his order when one of the girls he’d met the night before texted him. Usually, he’d wait at least a half an hour before responding, but the ‘new video’ message made him open the message. If she’d gone to this show and the one last night…

The video loaded over a message that simply read: ‘Uh, should I post this?????’

Raising his eyebrows, Jack played the video. He vaguely recognized the alleyway on the side of the hotel. Two figures were standing at odds with one another, and after a moment of staring, he could recognize Simon and Klavier. So that’s where they went, he thought. A glance at the caption let him read ‘omg they’re fighting’ and he held the speaker close to his ear to listen. Klavier was talking…he could hardly hear over the white noise, and after he nodded his thanks to the bartender, he plugged his other ear.

“…but I’m very quickly learning that I was wrong,” Klavier’s tinny voice finally registered, and he raised his eyebrows. So Simon had finally stood up to him? Maybe I should buy him a drink, Jack thought, eyeing the beer in front of him. The video skipped, and Jack glanced to see that the snapchat video had another ten seconds on it.

“I told you when all this started that if any of it started to feel off, I was out, remember?” He could hear Simon ask, and he felt his stomach drop. If Simon left…well…the band would be screwed.

“Hey, you’re from that band!” A man across the bar interrupted him, and Jack looked up, gave one chin lift, and held the speaker closer. The man turned to the kid he was with and took out his phone. “Hey, can we get a picture?”

“Can I get a minute of privacy!” Jack snapped, dragging the cursor back to whatever he’d just missed and jamming it into his ear again.

“…I was out, remember?” Simon repeated, and Jack strained his ear to hear the rest of the video. “Maybe I should leave when you kick Jack out of the band.”
He froze and blinked at the bar. *What?*

He rewound the video again.

*Maybe I should leave when you kick Jack out of the band.*

Again.

*When you kick Jack out of the band.*

He didn’t have to move the cursor to hear it a fourth time.

*Kick Jack out of the band.*

The phone fell from his hand, and clattered onto the bar. He stared at it, watching as the sender started typing, stopped, and started again. She’d probably noticed that he’d seen it. His mind raced, tripping over itself to get a good idea of what he’d just heard.

*They’re kicking me out, he finally let himself think. After everything I’ve put up with, the blood, sweat and tears I’ve spilled into this?*

He swallowed hard, which wasn’t an easy task with his throat so dry. Snatching the bottle in front of him, he made sure to down the entire thing before letting himself think again.

*They’re kicking me out? After Klavier Gavin messed up so badly tonight!?*

He slammed the bottle down and barked for another. The bartender looked his way, shrugged, and returned to the woman to which he’d been speaking for a moment while his hands worked to grab what he’d offered Jack earlier. He couldn’t understand what the man said as he set another one in front of him, but Jack didn’t care. The entire Khura’inese language was fucked, in his opinion. He’d be happy when he left the dumb country. Kingdom. Whatever.

*Delete it, he typed back to the girl, and her text bubble stopped popping up.*

*Are you sure?* The response came quickly, and when he moved to respond, the second beer was already empty.

*Yes.*

He locked his phone and shoved it into the back of his jeans, gripping the bottle in his free hand. It hurt a little, but it was better than splintering the bar.

*Like hell they’re kicking me out, he thought bitterly.*

Chapter End Notes

Hard to believe that this started with my friend saying how Simon would sound like the lead singer of Disturbed if he sang, isn’t it?
The Sound of Silence

Chapter Summary

"Fools," said I, "You do not know; silence, like a cancer grows.
"Hear my words that I might teach you,
"Take my arms that I might reach you."
But my words, like silent raindrops fell...and echoed in the wells, of silence.

Chapter Notes

We reached 100 kudos, y'all! Happy 100 kudos, happy update day, happy...yeah. I had to take a break from this for a hot minute while we figured out a lot of stuff. I'm not saying I'll be a little more regular with updates from now on, but I am saying that my personal stuff might get less in the way of this. Hopefully. Who knows. What I do know is that this chapter is long. And we have some more long chapters to come. So, um...buckle up?

This is stupid, Apollo thought as he shuffled forward in line, shoving his hands in the pockets of his cargo shorts. He’d all but thrown his courtroom clothes off as soon as he was at home, and he’d seriously considered staying in his bed under the new air conditioning unit. It had taken his phone ringing over and over before he’d moved, and Ema had proposed the current plan. He’d wanted to blow her off so badly, but she’d made a good point.

There’s been petitions for Gavin’s band to come here for years. You wanna miss them this time, or wait years until we get another chance? Her text had read, and after letting a frustrated groan into his pillow, he’d relented. The gray tank top on top of his khaki shorts still felt suffocating in contrast to his bed, but at least he was up and out of the house.

More suffocating than the shirt, however, were the people around him.

“I can’t believe they’re this popular,” Ema muttered. “Have you listened to any of their stuff?”

“Not really,” Apollo lied. Ever since Clay had brought it up, he’d been cycling through the band’s repertoire, trying to find the meanings and lyricists behind each of their songs. He’d even made a chart in his notebook at home for it.

He wasn’t obsessed. He wasn’t concerned. It didn’t bother him. Really, it didn’t.

“I mean, I knew a lot of people here liked them, but...wow,” she sighed. “Did you know that Sahmdadhi saw them on their opening night?”

That got Apollo’s attention, and his head snapped up at her. “Seriously?”

She nodded. “He tried hiding it, but he took that night off and then had the stamp on the back of his
hand the next day.”

Apollo blinked up at her before he finally nodded in a reluctant approval. “I mean…I guess I can see it. Maybe he was bored that day?”

“Maybe,” she muttered, fanning herself with her printed out ticket. “Or, maybe they’re just good.”

“Doubtful.”

Her shoulders rose and fell with a quick giggle, and Apollo pushed himself to his tiptoes to try and see over the crowd.

“More importantly, why didn’t Nahyuta invite us to go? At least he would’ve been able to see over all these people,” Apollo grumped.  *Or he would have gotten VIP treatment, since he’s pretty much royalty...*

“He probably thought it wasn’t our thing,” Ema muttered, mirroring Apollo’s pose. Technically, the doors should have opened fifteen minutes ago, but…

As far away as Apollo was, he could still see when someone inside stuck a piece of paper to the inside of the door, and the people closest to it groaned before they started spreading the news to the people behind them.

“What’s going on?” Ema asked. Apollo raised an eyebrow but let himself fall back down to his normal height. From his right, he heard a loud voice yell ‘It’s been postponed!’

A pit fell in his stomach, and he turned to Ema, who shrugged. “Postponed?”

“Come back tomorrow!” Another person in the crowd yelled, a tall, burly man with his hands cupped around his mouth. “Gavin’s sick!”

“Sick?” Apollo parroted. Ema’s brow furrowed. The others waiting in line began turning away, muttering something or another to their friends, and some complaining about the inconvenience.

“Gavin’s never sick,” Ema crossed her arms over her chest. “Well, at least when it comes to his shows.” She grinned, as if she had more to say, but another look at Apollo silenced her. She snapped her mouth shut; he actually looked…concerned?

Oh, Apollo, she thought with a sigh, *you’ve gotta get over him.*

“Wanna go see what the note says?” She offered, and Apollo turned his attention back to the doors. Between the crowd dispersing and a few unbelieving fans hanging around, it would take some maneuvering to make his way through.

“We’ve come this far,” he shrugged. “Might as well.”

Ema gestured for him to lead, and waited for him to move past her before she followed behind. As they wove through the groups and around the retreating Khura’inese, she gripped her bag tightly. They’d been in Khura’in for around two years now, and the entire time, Apollo had kept mostly to himself. Sure, he went out with her and Nahyuta and Rayfa when Datz forced him to, but other than those instances…

Sure, his workload was ridiculous. She’d had to all but force him to pace himself when he first dove headfirst in, and every once in a while, she’d still catch him working himself into the ground. The friends she’d made herself had been gracious in letting her drag him along, but even then, his
appearances would be few and far between. He always said he was ‘too tired’ or ‘too drained’ from the
day.

She understood that, really she did. Her workload and Apollo’s workload were similar in size. She
spent unending days with Nahyuta in the field, in the courthouse, or flying back to America to help
out Edgeworth whenever she could.

It didn’t mean that she couldn’t make friends. Or time for friends. Apollo had Clay, sure, but there
was a difference between Skyping someone and actually sitting down in person with them. At her
request, he’d joined a few dating apps, but after a while, he’d always delete them in the end without
so much as a match. She’d poked fun that he was too picky, and he’d laughed, waved her off, and
said he just wasn’t ready for that.

When she’d first invited him to the concert, he’d been reluctant. He’d stared at the flyer for a solid
minute before blinking back up at her. “Really?” He’d asked with a quirked eyebrow.

“What could it hurt?” She’d shrugged. “Besides, I think it’s amazing he’s out of his house for once.”

That had shut Apollo up, and she’d watched how his face had softened and he’d bit his lips
together. She knew he’d been thinking about the years they’d spent in America, both working and
dancing around Gavin. Of course she’d tried to bring it up every once in a while, but every time,
Apollo had bristled and changed the subject. He’d agreed to come out tonight after a few more
hmm’s and hah’s, and she’d bought the tickets. A part of her was ticked at Gavin for having the
nerve to be sick after she’d been trying to get Apollo out of his own house for so long. Trying to
drag him out tomorrow night would be another production.

Apollo stopped in front of the locked doors, his brow furrowed and hands curled into fists at his
sides. It was a pose she’d seen on him many times; if he wasn’t careful, he’d have a wicked wrinkle
in his forehead soon. She took a look back at the direction from which they’d come before turning to
the note.

Tonight’s concert has been postponed due to Klavier Gavin’s health. Please return with your tickets
tomorrow, and you will be admitted to the show. If you cannot make it, please email your ticket
provider, and you will be refunded.

We apologize for any inconvenience.

“So he’s not sick,” she set her hands on her hips. “He’s just being lazy.”

Apollo bristled. “Something’s wrong,” he said, and she looked over at him.

“What, you have a sixth sense now or something?”

“Just an inkling,” he shook his head. “It’s like you said; Mr. Gavin doesn’t miss shows.”

“Well, it looks like we’re going to have to come back tomorrow to see for ourselves,” she shrugged.
Apollo crossed his arms over his chest, and his lips pouted out. She let an eyebrow rise up on her
forehead. “You aren’t going to try and break in to figure out what’s wrong, are you?”

The pause that followed was long enough to make her nervous.

Finally, blessedly, Apollo turned to give her a nervous grin. “What? No, I—,” the grin faded and he
turned back to the door, somber. She could see him reading and rereading the note. “I’m sure he’s
fine.”
Ema’s eyebrows shot up on her forehead, but before she could say anything else, Apollo turned on his heel and walked away, arms still crossed over his chest.

Simon sat in the hospital, elbows on his knees and hands folded in front of himself. He hated waiting rooms; hell, he hated hospitals more than anything, but…

At least he wasn’t in the waiting room. He sat in a side hallway in the Khura’inese hospital, listening to the conversation inside. For ‘hygiene’ purposes, he’d been forced to leave Taka at the hotel, which was balderdash on every count, but at least he’d been allowed in to sit in the same vicinity as Gavin.

Gavin.

Now that was a headache and a half.

Of course the guilt had been eating away in his stomach over two nights before. He’d be more concerned if, after some self reflection, he’d found he didn’t feel guilty over their fight. He’d seen Klavier look defeated in the past, yes, but…

At least Klavier had always kept it together. As terrible as he might have gotten in the past few months, he’d at least put himself together enough to go out in public the next day. Looking back, Simon knew that that hadn’t helped—in fact, it had all culminated into what had happened—but at least Klavier hadn’t ended up in the hospital.

After they’d gone their separate ways in the alleyway, Simon had stormed past a few bystanders, face red, and kept walking until his legs felt like jelly. He’d stopped—inconveniently—in the middle of two rice farms, and had aimlessly tried finding his way back to the main highway for hours. It hadn’t been the smartest thing in the world, but it had given him time to think.

Klavier’s words had stung his ears like a wasp hovering around him. To a point, they still did, but their vitriol had lost some power since they’d first been spoken.

“I just didn’t expect to be hurt like this from you, Simon. I expected you to be better than he was.”

Passively, Simon wondered if Kristoph, from whatever circle of hell he was watching, was pleased.

“I’ve never known how someone thought you could be a murderer. But I’m very quickly learning that I was wrong.”

Well, Kristoph Gavin, Simon bit his lips together, raising and lowering his heels to rock back and forth, you’ve given your brother a torturous existence.

And, in turn, he’s giving everyone around him the same.

It was an unfair thought, he knew, but he’d seen Dee when she’d first arrived. Her hair had been wild, even for her, and she’d looked more haggard than he’d seen her.

When he’d first rolled back up to the hotel in the passenger seat of a very nice farmer’s truck, she’d all but crashed through the front doors to grab him in a bone-crushing hug.

The hug had quickly turned into a long lecture with a few shoves (which had, to his amusement,
hardly even jostled him). She’d obviously not slept the night before, but at least she’d taken out her contacts and had changed out of her work attire. Simon had tried to apologize for his behavior. She refused to hear any of it. When they’d walked back into the hotel, Betsy and Stein had risen from their seated positions on the lobby couches and encircled him in a hug, too. There had been a point in time, Simon had mused, wherein he’d rebelled against so much physical contact, but at that moment, it had made sense.

Plus, Stein had slowly worn his distaste for physical affection down over the last two years.

Dee had called an emergency band meeting in the hotel’s conference room shortly after that, and had caught everyone up to speed.

Klavier’s tantrum, as Simon had seen it in the alleyway, had turned into a full-blown meltdown. The security Dee had called before Simon had left the venue had heard him screaming, and then glass breaking before they’d forced their way inside. They’d found Klavier on the floor. Dee didn’t go into much detail, but with some persuasion, Simon had gotten the details from the guards. Apparently they’d found Klavier in a pool of blood, shaking and sobbing like a child. He’d shattered the mirror on the back of his door. When they’d tried to pick him up, he’d screamed like a madman, and they’d had to restrain him until the EMTs could come and take him away. His hands had been pretty cut up, but besides that, he’d been physically fine. He’d stayed in the hospital that night, and after they’d stitched him up, they’d transferred him to the mental health unit for observation.

Yesterday, Simon had been told to take it easy. Their last show in Khurai’n had been postponed, so he, Betsy, Rhys, and Stein had gone to a solemn dinner at one of the bars they could find. They’d invited Jack, but he’d refused before they could get further than ‘We’re going to—’. Unfortunately Simon hadn’t been surprised. Betsy and Stein had still been shaken up about the whole ordeal; they’d come back in time to see the ambulance take Klavier away, and Betsy had passed by his room before it was totally blocked off.

“I saw how much blood was in there,” she’d said, her arms crossed on the table in front of her. “I don’t know what he was thinking.”

Simon had stayed quiet, but the thought had eaten away at him.

He’d wanted to say “I knew what was going through his head,” but he’d bitten his tongue and taken another pull from his drink. Rhys and Stein had offered their ideas, but after that, they’d switched to less gruesome topics, for which Simon was grateful.

Even now, the day after their outing, it still ate away at Simon.

He knew what Klavier had been thinking.

He’d placed the thoughts there.

Well, maybe not placed. Even a bumbling fool could have seen the thoughts from miles away, but Simon had reached into Klavier’s dense subconscious, dragged them out, and forced Klavier to look at them.

For that, he felt no remorse. As Klavier had said, it had been a long time coming. After two long years of trying to talk to him, Simon was more surprised he hadn’t snapped earlier.

He did, however, feel remorse for the way he’d finally forced Klavier to face his issues. As much as it had needed to happen, no one deserved to have a breakdown like Klavier’d had. Dee had
forbidden Simon to come the day before, but he’d woken early and spent most of the day sitting in
the hospital, waiting for news. The last time he’d checked his phone, it had been around 3 in the
afternoon, and Dee was supposed to make a call about the show tonight before 4.

She was sure cutting it close, at least. Simon felt his stomach twist.

Today was the day they were supposed to talk to Jack.

At the end of the day, at least, something would go in Klavier’s favor. He’d talked to Dee and
offered to take Klavier’s place when they talked with him. It was the least he could do.

The door at the end of the hallway opened, and Simon raised his head to see Dee emerge from the
psych ward with a bundle of papers under her arm. She’d forced contacts back in her eyes, but the
red pants she wore replaced the red of her lenses. The white and black striped shirt looked pristine
against the cream-painted doors. Simon sat straight when she held the door open behind her, his
hands resting on his knees.

Klavier sauntered out after her, looking much like a cat after it’s been out in the rain. His hair, frizzy
and obviously rustled from—he assumed—a long night of worrying, stood out at three different
angles. The product from the night before must not have washed out. His eyes looked haunted, as if
he hadn’t slept since he and Simon’s fight.

The guilt twisted in Simon’s stomach. At least Dee had brought him a change of clothes, which, like
the rest of his clothes, hung off him more loosely than seemed healthy, but the clean jeans and
sweatshirt at least gave off a look of comfort. Simon opened his mouth as if to say something—
anything—but shut it quickly at Klavier’s stare. Standing straighter, Klavier took his hands, which
had been hanging slack at his sides, and shoved them in his front pocket. Simon tried not to look
down, but he couldn’t help catching the wrapped right hand and bandaged left wrist. He must have
hit the mirror with his right hand first, and then caught some of the shards on the outside of his left
arm. Simon forced his eyes back up to Klavier’s face, where a few stitches held the skin on his right
cheekbone together. Klavier squared his shoulders and walked forward. Simon swallowed the lump
in his throat.

“Fop-dono,” he started to say, noticing the stitches on the back of Klavier’s head. Klavier’s eyes
flicked up to him for a moment before he turned them back forward, pointedly not acknowledging
his preferred nickname. Suffocating the tired rage that threatened to tear its way out again, he tried
softening the look on his face. “Klav—,”

Before he could go on, Klavier passed in front of him. He drew his left hand, the closest to Simon,
out of the pocket and stiff-armed him in the chest before he continued forward without a word.
Blinking, Simon looked down at where he’d been pushed. Klavier’s left hand hadn’t any bandages
on it, but Simon had noticed the stitches on the heel of his hand.

That little push, even though Klavier would never admit it, must have stung.

Well, it was something. They’d be a little awkward together for the next few days, but Simon
figured that was only normal.

He watched Klavier retreat down the hall by himself, only looking away when the clacking of Dee’s
heels stopped on his other side. He looked down to see Dee standing by him, lips turned down.

“What was that?” He asked, looking back up at where Klavier had been. She shook her head.

“He needs some space,” she sighed. “I told him about you coming with to talk to Jack.”
“And?”

“I assume that was his way of saying ‘thank you’.”

Simon’s shoulders rose and fell with a mirthless chuckle. “If he hadn’t just come from the hospital, I’d call him a whackadoodle.”

She snorted at that, but fixed him with a grin anyway. “Yeah, might want to hold off on that for now.”

“So we’re staying another night in Khura’in?”

Dee blinked up at him. “What do you mean?”

“He doesn’t honestly think he’s playing guitar like that, does he?”

She sighed, but walked past Simon. With little other choice, he followed. “Try telling him otherwise. We’re on for tonight.”

The nerves under Apollo’s skin seared his forearms. He and Ema shuffled forward with everyone else in line, and try as he might to calm himself down, the hairs on his arm refused to settle. Between investigations today and his appearance in court, he’d had time to glance at his phone. Clay, ever his wingman, had sent him an article from that morning.

*Inside Klavier Gavin’s Meltdown:* the article had read, *Is Rehab On the Horizon?*

Apollo had blinked down at his phone during the recess, and had all but missed his cue to reenter. Had it not been for Rayfa prodding him in the side after he’d been called three times, he would have missed it.

A meltdown? Clay had mentioned something about him not looking well, but…a meltdown? Apollo felt sick at the thought of it.

“How’s it going?” Ema asked, but not from where Apollo had left her. She’d moved up four spaces in line, and had turned around to make sure Apollo was still with her. With a squawk, Apollo surged forward, beating three people from taking his place.

“Sorry,” he muttered.

“You sure you’re okay?”

“Just a long day,” Apollo shook his head. “You were at the trial.”

“Yeah, talk about a doozy,” she crossed her arms over her chest. “Can’t win ‘em all, am I right?”

“I guess,” he muttered. He’d really believed his client from today to be innocent. The guy who he’d defended that day had been so…adamant that he didn’t do it. Not to mention that, through their few days of investigating, Apollo had felt…something between them. Of course, it had been so long since he’d felt anything other than a platonic fondness for someone else that he hadn’t been sure, but…

For fuck’s sake, he still remembered the shortness of breath, the pounding in his chest, and the absolute aching in his heart whenever he caught the right look from someone else.
Ema must have caught on to the dark cloud hanging over him, because she pursed her lips together and changed the subject. “So, are you excited?”

Apollo shrugged. “I guess. Clay’s more into them than I am, and he hasn’t gone a day without talking about how jealous of us he is.”

He didn’t want to bring up the fact that he had a secret playlist dedicated to the band’s albums, but he figured…well, it was solely for research purposes. Clay had started it by pointing out the lyrics, he was only putting in a dedicated effort to helping out his friend. Besides, it was a secret playlist for a reason.

He also didn’t want to mention that he’d rearranged that playlist last night into what he hoped would be tonight’s setlist. It had been and insomnia-ridden decision, but he’d done it, and there was no going back now. The venue, Khura’in’s biggest concert stadium, had some other hard rock playing as they were ushered inside, and as Apollo shoved his ID back into his wallet, he took a healthy look around.

In his time in Khura’in, he’d had very little time to go out and just be. It had always bothered him, sure, but he’d put his clients in front of his want to go out any day. Ema had always poked fun at him, grinning as he found excuses to never go to one of the functions she was excited about, or calling him an old man. Which he—of course—resented. Granted, he’d only been to the venue once before…in the morning…for one of Trucy’s shows. Everything else was just so late.

Okay, so maybe she’s not completely off the mark when she calls me an old man, Apollo thought with a sigh. He looked up to see Ema standing next to him, already two beers in her hand.

“When did you—,”

“Oh, shut up and drink,” she rolled her eyes, handing him one and taking a long drink from her plastic cup. With a sigh and a shrug, Apollo did the same, taking in the venue for the second time.

The stage wasn’t the biggest he’d seen in his life, but then again, his only experience with a rock concert was an arena concert with Clay back in the day. Its wings were covered by brick walls that left enough of the stage uncovered so one or two people could fit on it. There weren’t any screens on the two walls on either side of the stage, just two lines of giant speakers. Lights hung from the rafters, dimmed now to enhance the ‘wow’ effect during the show. On the stage sat three sets of equipment, one for each band slated to play. If he stood on his tiptoes—which he absolutely refused to do—he could have seen the one for Klavier’s band waiting patiently to be used.

Klavier’s band.

Just the thought of seeing them live shot fresh pulses of adrenaline through his arms, and he took another drink to try and hide his nerves.

“Hey! Ground control to major Justice!” Ema yelled, crouched over to yell in his ear. Apollo sputtered around the beer in his mouth and turned to her. She looked as though she’d been trying to get his attention for a few minutes.

Plus, she’d been hanging out with Clay too long.

“What!?"

“Follow me!” She grabbed him by the arm and dragged him closer to the stage. He reluctantly followed, the slight downward incline of the floor catching him off guard. He stumbled, leaning into Ema.
“Where are all these people coming from?” He asked as they came to a stop. “They don’t actually start playing for another two hours right?”

“Right,” she nodded. “But when it’s general admission like this, with a band this big in Khura’in? Come on, you’ve gotta know that we need to get the good places to stand right away!”

“I—I guess,” he blinked. He hadn’t even thought about it.

Ema stopped twenty feet in front of the stage, pulling Apollo sharply to the left, to were a railed ramp was built into the concrete floor. It was a good spot, he figured. If anything, it was close to the side bar, which he figured was her end goal in the first place. She positioned Apollo in front of herself and leaned her elbows on his shoulders, standing on her tiptoes and using him for support.

“What are you doing?” He asked.

“Checking my viewing range,” she said, watching the people around them filter in. “Can you see?”

“Uh, yeah?”

“Cool,” she nodded. “We’re keeping this spot then!”

On principle, Simon didn’t try to pace. It was a futile gesture of nerves trying to work their way out of the human body. He knew the urge to walk, to jog, to run, and he knew for a fact that pacing did nothing to assuage those urges. He’d stand by his statement through thick and thin, because, well..he considered himself an expert. Seven years of pacing around the same cell block had built quite the resume.

Nevertheless, he paced now, gnawing at the inside of his lower lip. He had to to to the bathroom--again--but he’d yet to see Gavin for the show. The man had stayed in his hotel room all day. Betsy, Rhys, Stein, and Dee had all taken shifts keeping him company (a nice phrase to use instead of babysitting), but when Simon had offered to take one, Dee had simply placed a hand on his arm and turned to the rest of the group, saying she’d get the other three the hotel’s security information. It had stung, sure, but Simon figured it was for the best. He wasn’t sure what he’d say to Gavin if they were left alone again. Maybe they’d be all right. But he wanted to wait until after the show to apologize. At least then Jack would be out of the picture, and Gavin would have one less stressor.

It wouldn’t take care of the other stressors weighing down on him, but it would help a little.

And the fewer stressors weighing on Gavin, the fewer that would weigh on Simon, and then the better off they’d both be.

The man in question, Jack, had hardly been seen all day, as well. Right now he was sulking in the corner, tuning and re-tuning his guitar. Gavin had missed Dee’s call for them at 6, and now the second band was already starting their own set. If he wanted to show up—

The door opened, and a haggard Klavier Gavin appeared in the doorway. His hair was styled in his normal updo, the sides of his undercut freshly shaved to peach fuzz. The concealer he’d tried using on the bags under his eyes hardly helped him. Whatever he’d done to his cheekbones only accentuated what Simon had seen for years; the fullness Gavin used to have in his cheeks were gone. Absently, he realized it was actually on purpose; Gavin had turned himself into a living skeleton for their last performance in Khura’in.

Well, Simon thought with half a grin, it goes well with the bandages on his hands and the stitches on
his face.

He still had a hard time believing Dee had allowed him to play tonight, but with their tour schedule already booked so tightly...

He couldn’t help feeling that they should’ve just cancelled tonight’s show. A refund to all the fans currently in—and still coming in to—the venue would have been better than staring at a half-dead Gavin. He did his best not to focus on the bandages Klavier—or maybe Dee—had replaced the old ones with. They were black instead of the white ones he’d seen earlier, and a band-aid held together whatever had happened to his right thumb. He could still bend it, luckily, but Simon couldn’t imagine how he was supposed to seriously play when he looked like—

Well, when he looked so fragile. It wasn’t like their set was easy on either of them. The first few times they’d played it, he’d had a hard time believing how tired he felt. Luckily they’d have a few days off coming up, but it wouldn’t be enough to really let Gavin recover.

Simon stood up straighter when Klavier’s eyes fell on him, and he couldn’t believe the grin that came to the man’s face.

“Achtung!” He snapped with his right hand. Apparently he didn’t have enough damage to keep him from acting…like himself. “What are you doing sitting around like the world has ended? We have a show to put on!”

Simon blinked at him.

“You can’t be serious,” Betsy half-laughed from where she leaned against the couch in the green room. “You stayed in your room all day and that’s your opening line?”

Klavier placed his hands on his hips and shrugged. It was only then, in that moment, that Simon noticed the distinct wobble to the man.

Ah, he bit his lips together. That would explain it.

“What do you expect? A tired, sad rockstar moping in the corner?” He grinned. “That’s why we have Jack.”

Simon could feel Jack bristling behind him, and he crossed his arms over his chest. His mind raced, trying with little avail to think of something to do to get a drunk—probably high, too—Gavin to calm down. In his experience, his usual tools only served to make people in Gavin’s current state worse. The only thing he could reasonably—and safely—try would be to just get through the night.

Luckily, Jack only scoffed and sat a little straighter. Klavier gestured at him and looked to Betsy as if to say ‘you see what I mean?’ and grabbed his guitar. “I’m going to go tune backstage, the vibe here is distinctly schrecklich.”

As soon as he’d entered, Klavier left. Simon moved as if to follow him, but Stein beat him to the door. He pushed the door open and rushed after Klavier, his long legs making it easy for him to catch up.

“Klavier!” Stein called after him, but the man kept moving, grinning and nodding at everyone he passed. “Klavier, hey—!”

The man in question stopped in his tracks, holding out his guitar away from Stein so that, when they collided, it wasn’t harmed.
“Was willst du von mir?” Klavier asked after Stein recovered, a touch of steel in his voice. Stein blinked, pushing his long blond hair back behind his ear. “I have played the game all day, Stein, what do you want from me?”

“What happened between me leaving and now?” He hissed. He’d spend the last bit of the day with Klavier before Dee had dismissed him, and the pit in his stomach told him he’d left at the absolutely wrong time. “You were stone sober, and now—,”

“Stop it,” Klavier held up a hand between himself and Stein, his eyes glaring daggers into the other man. “Just. Stop, Stein. Bitte.”

“Klavier, we’ve been worried sick about you!” Stein tried again. “Dee’s at the hotel now—,”

“I said hör jetzt auf,” Klavier repeated, and Stein blinked at him. Whatever mask Klavier had put on to face the rest of the band, he let down now, and the same desperate eyes Stein remembered from earlier in the day were back.

“I’m sorry, Klavier,” he tried again, softer. “Come on, I know this is important to you—” without thinking, he reached out and grabbed Klavier’s right arm as if to guide him to the green room again.

Immediately, Klavier’s hand turned into a fist and he grabbed the front of Stein’s shirt, pulling the man’s face down so they were eye to eye. Stein blinked at him, staring at the light blue eyes that burned in their sockets.

“Nothing—matters—right now,” Klavier ground out between gritted teeth, knuckles white. “One night, Stein. I want one night where I feel like a normal human being, not some—fucking—psychological experiment between you all.” He looked down at his feet, and for a moment, Stein could swear the man was about to cry. When he looked up, however, the redness in the corners of his eyes were only from drugs, not emotion. He looked down at his fist, still tightly locked around Stein’s collar.

The band-aid around his pinkie and ring finger was red. He sucked in a sharp breath at the pain and closed his eyes for a moment longer than a standard blink. “Verzeihung,” he muttered, shoving the other man away and turning on his heel, doing his best to forget the red stain he’d left on Stein’s otherwise pristine white shirt, focusing instead on the white hot pain shooting up his right arm.

Apollo had to hand it to Ema; she sure knew how to pick a spot to stand. They’d stayed in generally the same position for the first few bands, which had been…all right. He’d never heard of either, but their enthusiasm had been so contagious that he’d forgotten how many drinks Ema had pressed into his hands. Vaguely, he remembered reminding Ema about their work day tomorrow, but after she’d asked him how much he really cared, he’d shrugged and accepted the offered drink. He had a sinking feeling she’d ask him to reimburse her the next day, but the feeling was quickly washed away when the lights in the audience dimmed again, and the general murmur of the crowd turned into excited cheering. He felt Ema, still behind him, pushing him forward, and he moved forward with the crowd that rushed the stage. When they came to a stop, they were still on the incline, but they’d left the comfort of the railing.

He opened his mouth as if to ask what was happening when the lights behind the last drum set fuzzed to life, blinking in rapid strobes as the sound of static came over the PA. Apollo blinked, squinting at the stage to try and see the figures moving on stage clearer. The cheers around him grew louder as a voice joined the static, some pre-recorded mantra he recognized from their albums.

“And I just don’t think you could ever understand——“ the woman’s voice was saying. It had been at
the end of their album—“because you’ve never understood how much I can care about just one person, one amazing, wonderful, fantastic person”—but now, as the sound of an electric guitar joined the cacophonous static, he couldn’t imagine hearing it the same way on the album again. “No one can, and I can’t believe you’d ask me to change, because it’s meaningless!”

No, he’d never hear it the same way ever again. Not with the crowd pressing in around him, screaming louder when the keys and bass joined in as well.

“It’s meaningless, all of it!” Her voice grew more frantic as the prelude continued. “You, me, this—this facade! I can’t do it, you can’t help me, not when we’re all just going to fade away!”

The music cut out as she yelled the last two words, leaving the room in a tense, communal moment of bated breath. Then, all at once, green lights flashed on, sweeping from side to side as the bass drum and guitar crashed into the introduction to the song that followed the recording on that album. They strobed with the steady beat from the drummer, and Apollo strained to see the guitarist standing to the right of the stage, hair styled into an unbelievably high mohawk. He could feel the adrenaline pumping through his stomach in tandem with the drum as that guitarist played through the riff three times.

When the bass drum cut out for the fourth, all the lights cut out.

Only to blind the audience in a green and white flash, the spotlights hanging from the rafters sweeping from side to side and finally lighting the band members on the stage. It was all so much that Apollo could really only focus on the figure stalking up the stairs, and then onstage in time with the drums.

It had been years since Apollo had seen Simon Blackquill. His reaction in that moment was the same as it had been when they’d first met; shock, intimidation, and, he hated to admit it, a little bit of jealousy. He couldn’t help but wonder what he’d do if he were that tall. He stopped in the middle of the stage and held the microphone to his mouth, deep baritone voice filling in the space left for him at the start of the first verse.

A part of Apollo hadn’t actually believed that it was Simon singing on their albums. He’d faced the man in court, been there for his acquittal, and even shared multiple bowls of soba with him, but he’d never been able to imagine the man he’d seen then opening his mouth and…that coming out. It was only logical, he figured, that someone as tall and broad as Simon would have the range he did, but still. To see it on concert footage, or to hear it on an album was totally different than seeing it in person, and knowing viscerally that, were he to just shut his mouth, the song would stop. He was so caught up in his awe that he had to rip his eyes off of Simon when the lead guitarist stepped up to the microphone to provide harmonies.

And, coincidentally, Apollo’s breath caught in his throat.

After Clay had told him about Klavier’s new project, Apollo had obviously spent an entire evening on the Internet, scanning all the new pictures of Klavier Gavin and reading through the interviews. In fact, even though he’d been bushed that sweltering night months ago, he’d been so swept up in the excitement that he’d forgotten to sleep.

He’d had to rescind his promise to Clay that he wouldn’t hyper fixate on Klavier, of course.

He was overwhelmed with the same awe he’d felt when seeing Simon sing for the first time. When he saw Klavier, the feeling was much different. So much so, in fact, that he forgot to breathe. They were on the wrong side, dammit, but knowing that he was in the same country—the same room as him again—
His jaw clenched. Once again, the muscles under his arms felt like they were about to claw their way out of his skin. His palms broke out in the cold sweat of the forgotten and unsent text messages. His throat ran dry, and he was suddenly acutely aware of the pounding in his chest. His chest?

No, his heart pounded in his throat, each beat thrumming a new declaration that no, he was decidedly not over Klavier Gavin. All his posturing with Clay, all his promises to Ema that he’d finally moved on tore through his mind in an instant as he watched the man he’d fallen so quickly into close his eyes and harmonize with Simon. Against the microphone, Apollo could see a grin pulling at the side of Gavin’s mouth. Absently, he felt the bracelet around his wrist pulse, but in the commotion around him, it was just an afterthought.

The chorus ended, and Klavier burst away from the microphone as if he’d been electrocuted, an ecstatic, blissful grin plastered on his face.

Apollo’s heart skipped.

There was little—no, he knew there was nothing he wouldn’t do to take that moment—that moment of seeing Klavier genuinely excited—and memorializing it forever in his head. He did his best to do so from where he stood, stock still, feeling Ema jump and pump her fist behind him, her other hand still resting on his shoulder.

The song pulled to an end, and Apollo turned to her.

“We’re on the wrong side!” He heard himself yell over the intro to the next song, and Ema blinked at him.

“What?” She asked, and he bit his lips together, belatedly realizing what he was saying. She leaned closer to him, taking out one of her earplugs, but he shook his head.

“Never mind!” He called into her ear, and with a shrug, she replaced the plug and continued her—he wasn’t sure what to call it. Biting the inside of his lower lip, he turned back to the stage, where Klavier and Simon had turned to face each other, Klavier singing the same words as Simon, just a third step up. Apollo had heard the song before. He’d heard all their songs before. He hadn’t been sure what to expect, finally seeing Simon and Klavier live. Maybe he’d been expecting a bigger spark between the two, or a hint that they were really together, or…something. Either way, he’d expected some sort of closure.

What he stared at, however, were more questions than answers.

Klavier Gavin sure knew how to change his tune. To Simon, that would generally spell bad news with a capital B and N, but tonight, he was grateful for it. He hadn’t had to ask Stein why, when he came back to the green room, he’d had a stain on his shirt. He also hadn’t said a word when Betsy had offered a solution in the form of Kool-Aid in the women’s bathroom. All he knew was that, at the end of the night, he and Dee would sit down with Jack, and then they’d sit down with Klavier. And as uncomfortable as the thoughts made him, he knew that letting the wounds fester would only make them worse.

So, he sang. With the pit in his stomach and palms clammy on the microphone, he poured everything he had into that set. To the outside world, Klavier Gavin put on the face of someone who had figured their life out, and was currently living the dream. Simon channeled his anger, his frustration, his ire at Klavier into the words he screamed. Simon spent most of the night facing the
man who’d written the words; one way or another, he was going to make that man listen to them. Even if they had to spend all night with Gavin, he’d do it.

If nothing else, he’d do it just to spite Kristoph.

They’d switched the set list up only a little in order to keep the water calm between Simon and Klavier. When they reached the song Klavier had written about Kristoph’s dictatorship-like upbringing, the one he’d started melting down during the night before, Simon kept a close eye on the man.

Klavier was more subdued as the set went on, Apollo noted. A third of the way into the set, Simon moved away from the microphone to the water bottle sitting by an amplifier, and Klavier turned with him, facing his body away from the crowd and sticking out his tongue at the drummer, who returned his face with a middle finger. Klavier laughed, though when he looked down at the paper at his feet, the smile melted away and he stared at the guitar neck as if it were going to burn him as soon as he touched it.

The look only lasted for a moment, sure, before he got a nod from Simon, and started the riff to the next song. He made no move when their rhythm guitarist joined in, just stared down at the guitar neck with the same furrowed brow Apollo had seen on him when he was trying to follow a complicated piece of logic. Their bassist and other guitarist kept moving, sure, but Klavier’s stillness had changed the entire feel of the performance. A petty, ‘I-told-you-so’ part of him wanted to text Clay, if nothing else but to rub it in his face that he’d been right. He and Simon were singing most—if not all—of each other’s songs. The grown up in him, however, forced himself to actually take in Klavier Gavin.

The man was smaller than he remembered. During his first research sessions, he’d been taken aback at how much weight Gavin had lost. Sure, he’d noticed it during the trial at the Academy, but it had gotten so much worse. Seeing his hair so short was jarring too, yes. It didn’t shine the same way it had when they’d known each other. Perhaps it was the product he’d sprayed into it every night. Maybe it was the lighting. But Apollo knew—that his hair didn’t shine for the same reason his eyes didn’t, either. He bit his lips together, taking in the tattoos on Klavier’s left arm. He couldn’t make them out as well as he’d been able to on his computer, but he knew—the phoenix and abstract around his shoulder and elbow well. He moved to see if he could make out the grand ship on his forearm, but—

He blinked. The cuffs around his arms—at least, he’d figured they were cuffs—looked a lot less solid than he had initially thought. He frowned, watching for a solid minute as a piece of one came loose, and Klavier frowned down at it.

Simultaneously, the blood fell straight from his face and into his feet, and his stomach twisted itself into a perfect knot. Klavier had done a…passable job at hiding the despair in his eyes by turning himself into a living skeleton, but Apollo had seen enough of their tour—researched every last bit of data to know that he’d never dressed like that before.

And he’d never, ever worn any of the goth cuffs like Simon wore now. The cuffs—no, the bandages—weren’t his choice.

“Bro, I’m not even on the same planet and I can see he’s not doing well.”

Inside Klavier Gavin’s Meltdown: Is Rehab on the Horizon?

Clay’s words bounced off the article’s headline in his head, and Apollo crossed his arms tightly over his midsection. He hoped, to anyone on the outside, it looked like he was cold, and, in a sense, that
was true. Just...a different kind of cold than the air temperature. He’d believed Clay, of course. His own research had yielded the same results.

There was something more under the surface that Klavier hadn’t resolved.

Apollo felt sick. He’d hoped—prayed for years that Klavier had the chance to move on. All the time Nahyuta and Rayfa made him spend in times of silent meditation…well, he’d struggled for so long until he’d finally asked Nahyuta what he was doing wrong.

He could hear his foster brother in his head, now: “Stop doing it for yourself. That’s your issue. Start meditating on others, and what you want for them.”

He’d tried, it, and every time, he’d always found himself back at square one; hoping that Klavier had found closure. Even if Apollo had never been able to, he’d hoped that at least one of them would come out okay.

Now, staring at Klavier, watching him on that stage, he knew that Klavier had never come out of the Misham trial. Even now, thousands of miles away, playing to an audience that loved him, Klavier was still behind the prosecutor’s bench, staring at the witness stand, mentally trying to piece together his brother’s betrayal. The realization ate away at him, weighing down harder on his shoulders than Ema trying to keep her balance.

The song ended, and Klavier ducked out of his guitar, trading it with a stagehand for an acoustic one. Simon watched them in the darkness; Dee had strictly forbade alcohol backstage tonight, and for that, he was grateful. Klavier must have figured it out before going onstage, because he didn’t heckle the poor man for anything. He simply nodded and pulled on the acoustic during Stein’s and Rhys’ interlude. He finally looked up at Simon, and his lips twitched up in a forced smile. Simon found himself giving him a nod, and Klavier turned back around to face the audience. Half the spotlights shut off as Stein ushered Rhys out of the interlude and into the next song, and Simon allowed himself half a grin when the audience roared at the first few notes. The same overwhelming sense of humility came over him the same way it did every night. They played the song as the end of their first act, and before Simon took his four-song break.

For so long, they’d left the title simply as ’SHEET 7’, as it had been called when he’d first shared it with Gavin the first night they’d worked together. He could remember, clear as day, Dee’s face when she’d first read the lyrics. He hadn’t thought much of it until Klavier had shown him that the song was one of their biggest singles. It sounded different when they played it live, yes (Klavier had hired an entire orchestra to play on their actual album), but either way, Simon had poured himself into the poem while he was in prison, and the validation did more for him than anything else. Right as he opened his mouth to sing, the spotlight on him flashed to life. Most of the song was spent with just that spotlight on himself and Stein. It wasn’t until Jack, distortion turned off on his pedal board, came in that the lights would return in full with Simon’s voice. Until then, he hushed his voice to the same volume he’d used in the prosecutor’s office a lifetime ago, singing in the dark with their keyboardist.

Apollo, thoughts still revolving around Gavin, found himself unable to look away, blink, or even breathe as the spotlight on Simon turned back on. He’d stepped up to the microphone and grasped the stand in one hand, holding the actual microphone in the other. The audience had significantly hushed themselves, enraptured much like Apollo at the advent of one of their most famous songs. Apollo had listened to it over and over; it lived on more than one of his (secret) playlists. Watching it live was like watching Simon come out of his shell.

Their rhythm guitarist’s entry into the song brought more lights with it, and Apollo could see Klavier again, though he was shadowed in order to keep the focus on Simon, and rightfully so. As more
instruments were added, his voice grew stronger. By the time the drummer came in, he was back at full volume, eyes squeezed shut in the emotion of it all, and Apollo felt like he could breathe again. Simon’s hair was so long that it was hard to read his face, but the powerful voice which the man had hidden for so long carried more emotion than Apollo had ever seen. Any thoughts he’d had of Klavier had dumped themselves out for the entirety of the song, and he stared up at Simon Blackquill like the singer was providing his own breath. Ema had stilled behind him, the vice grip she’d taken on his shoulders the only reassurance that she hadn’t moved.

Generally, when Simon sang the song, it was a test to see if he could re-emulate the emotion he’d put into the album, but today, now, after the roller coaster with Gavin the past two days, there was no test. There was no faking the growl in his voice during the last verse; he’d written the song while venting about the silence between two people who needed to speak to each other. Back then, it had been between him and Aura. Back then, it had been the closest he dared to telling the truth about the UR-1 incident.

Back then, it had been his lifeline.

Now, with Gavin standing next to him, he sang the words he longed to say to the man, opening his eyes only to stare at the back of the room. In that moment, forgetting himself, Simon reached out a hand even as he had to back away from the microphone in the final crescendo.

Apollo’s breath stopped again as the music cut out from Simon on his last note, hanging in the air like a solemn beacon as even the crowd hushed to a quiet whisper. Every light, save for the one focused on Simon, faded, but Simon Blackquill stood in the middle of the stage, arm outstretched, holding the note. He held it for at least three times as long as was necessary, but in that moment, Apollo couldn’t have been bothered if he were paid. In that moment, the only things that existed in the venue were Simon Blackquill, the single spotlight aimed at him, and that note.

The moment passed. Simon cut off. The light disappeared. The echo faded.

Unsure what else to do, the crowd lost it. Even Apollo found himself finally uncrossing his arms and clapping. When the lights didn’t come back on, the audience grew quiet again. The song wasn’t over; anyone who had heard it before knew that. Frowning, he started turning as if to see what Ema was thinking—

The light came back on Simon, and he finished the last words of the song. The band behind him crescendoed one last time, and again, the crowd cheered. Simon ducked away from the microphone, gave a two-handed wave to the audience, and ushered himself backstage.

The rest of the set went without a hitch, something for which Klavier was grateful. He’d returned to the green room after the meet-and-greet to grab his phone. Or...at least that’s what he’d told Dee and Rhys. He’d really gone there to grab the stash of pills he’d left in the plant sitting in the corner, and had downed a few before leaving again. Now, he ambled back to the stage with one hand pressed to his forehead. He hadn’t realized how much he owed Betsy, Rhys, and Stein for filling in the meet and greets after the past two performances until that moment. He’d have to buy them a drink. A very large drink. Or something.

The further he walked, the angrier he became, but as he stumbled over something left in the middle of the hallway, he found he didn’t care. He couldn’t remember why he was supposed to be angry. It
was...it could have been that he was angry at Dee for forbidding the stage crew from letting him
drink. That was a big one. It could have been that it was Simon, from the night...or maybe two
nights...before. That was still a little hazy. It could have been at the stage crew, for listening to
Dee. It could have been at Jack, for...well, for being himself. But they were getting a new guitarist
soon. He wouldn't have to worry about him for long.

*It could be that you're mad at yourself,* a piece of him thought, and he stopped in his tracks.

“Mad at me?” He slurred to no one in particular. “…No.”

*You weren't supposed to get high tonight.*

“D...doesn't matter,” he muttered, and kept going on his way to the stage. He did his best to ignore
that voice. He knew he didn't *need* to get high. Logically, that was a no-brainer, but...well, he’d
started shaking again halfway through the set, and he’d known exactly what would take care of it.

But the stage. He needed to focus on the stage. He’d forgotten...something there, and needed to go
back. He figured he’d remember what when he got there.

Tonight had been their last night in Khura’in, and Apollo *still* hadn’t come to see them. A part of
him, a very *big, loud* part of him screamed at Klavier to just *call* Apollo before they left. He could
be the bigger man. Maybe...maybe it would help. Maybe seeing someone else who had been there
for Kristoph’s breakdown...

But no. He couldn’t think about Kristoph right now. His mind kept going back to Apollo.

He found his way to the door that read ‘STAGE ENTRANCE’ and pushed his way through, glad
for the blessed dark. He wobbled, the drugs kicking in. He giggled at himself for wobbling; what
kind of man couldn’t handle two...or four....

*Shit,* he blinked, trying to sober up a little. *How much did I take?*

It wasn’t important. What kind of man couldn’t handle a dosage or two of—

Apollo. He was focused on Apollo. He was going to swallow his fucking pride, and be the first to
call him. They weren’t leaving until noon tomorrow, maybe if they stayed up all night tonight he
could sleep on the airplane...

He grabbed his phone out of his back pocket, wobbling again as he made his way up the rickety
stairs to the stage. The screen lit up his face on the second to last stair. Klavier stopped. His
contacts were...there. He tapped the button. Typed in ‘Herrrr Foprehnerasd’. He frowned, and
tried again. A contact showed up. He lifted one leg to find solid purchase on the stage.

*What are you doing?* A part of him, probably the last of his dignity, yelled. *You can't let Apollo see
you like this! You'll be humiliated!*

His leg came down. His foot landed on something soft. He let out a surprised cry, and fell to the
side. The phone dropped from his hands and clattered forward. It bounced off of whatever he’d
tripped on and landed face down. He tried bracing himself as he landed, but the feeling of stage on
his tender hands only made the pain worse, and he collapsed on his face, followed directly by his
shoulder. The stitches in his cheeks smarted.

It took him a minute to realize what had happened. He blinked. The world was...sideways? And
his phone levitated above the ground.
But that wasn’t right. It was face down. But it was higher than his eye level.

Not to mention that things didn’t levitate.

And parts of it were still visible. Rays of light came out from around it. The rays reflected off of fabric. Blinking bleary eyes, somewhat sobered by the pain, Klavier Gavin pushed himself to a kneeling position. Everything stung. He reached forward for the phone. When his fingers cradled the underside of it, they brushed the smooth fabric of a t-shirt. He blinked. He’d tripped on someone. Apparently he’d hurt himself worse than them, because they hadn’t made a sound.

Which…didn’t seem right.

Klavier crawled forward on the stage, bracing his arm on one side of the person’s midsection. His other hand, still holding the phone, shook. The light from the screen showed him a white shirt stained red by…blood? No. Not earthy enough for that. Kool Aid?

His stomach twisted. The Kool Aid stains were supposed to be familiar. He tried remembering it, but…

The phone swept closer to the person’s head. The stains turned from a light red to a much darker, earthier tone. Still red, though. He blinked. A metallic smell stung his nostrils, and his stomach fell to his feet. The hand bracing him wobbled. He forced the light upward again. Decidedly not Kool Aid. The red turned darker. Blinking bleary eyes again, he lowered the phone and brushed against the red with his pinkie and ring finger.

It stuck to him.

The metallic smell stung him again.

Blood. For real this time.

Klavier flinched back as if he’d touched a hot poker, not someone’s shoulder. The wing was swathed in black again at the motion, and Klavier’s heart thundered in his ears.


“Hello?” He whispered, and the room echoed it back. Whimpering, Klavier found his way back to the third stair down, and gained a wobbly foothold. It was too dark. He almost dropped the phone in a desperate attempt to find the flashlight.

When the bright light came on, he felt his heart stop in his chest.

There, sprawled out on the stage, laid a body. It was covered in blood from a head wound that had cracked the skull and made an uneven halo around the body’s head. Its arms were spread slightly at their sides. Whatever had happened to them, it had killed them instantly, but that hadn’t stopped the head from turning on its side from the blunt trauma.

For a minute, Klavier didn’t want to believe what he saw. Sure, he could see the brain, and pieces of skull from where they’d been hit, but that wasn’t what made the bloodcurdling scream rip from his own mouth.

He recognized that face. He’d spent the past two years with that face. The owner of that face had done nothing but give Klavier constant smiles and encouragement. In the darkest times of the band, he’d been the band’s light. He’d spent the meet-and-greet wondering where the hell that face was. Hell, he’d just threatened that face before the concert.
Klavier Gavin stared at the body of Stein Way, horrified, paralyzed, and screaming bloody murder.

Chapter End Notes

Literally.
Chapter Summary

You see
The things I cannot change,
The things that make me plain;
Lift me up, my soul's so hollow--
Lift me up...

Chapter Notes

I've decided I should probably stop apologizing for the length of these chapters, since now I've planned out the ending and there's a lot to say in them. I think this one cracked the 9k, and my last ace attorney fic was 127k...so we're well on our way to writing the longest cohesive story yet. Onwards and upwards, friends

The phone rang.

He hardly acknowledged it. Whoever it was, if it was important, would leave a message, and he’d get to them in the morning. Apollo grunted his affirmation into his pillow, turning further on his side and holding it tighter to his face. He settled in, trying to ignore the incessant vibrations on his nightstand. He didn’t even want to know what time it was; his alarm would wake him up at the proper time. He knew his alarm. And this was not it.

He muttered for it to shut up as the buzzing stopped, and let out a long breath. He’d meant to silence the damn thing, but he’d been so tired the night before that he’d forgotten.

A part of him knew he was overreacting. It had been two days since the concert, and despite Ema’s insistence that Klavier would call them, he hadn’t. Apollo had gotten so sick of staring at his phone that he’d left it plugged in on his nightstand the entire day prior, while he sat at his computer, trying —failing—to think of anything else.

He wasn’t upset about the concert itself. He’d known that Klavier Gavin was a showman first and foremost, so he’d had few doubts that Klavier would put on simply an okay show. No. The show had been amazing. Sure, he had little to compare it to, since he’d only been to one other concert in his adolescence, but on their way back to the cab afterward even Ema had a hard time finding another topic on which to speak. Simon’s voice, Klavier’s talent, the absolutely amazing musicians they’d found…it was all so much.

What had disappointed him was Klavier’s disappearance after the show. He and Ema had waited outside for what felt like hours for him to come out. They’d even seen the drummer and bassist outside, but neither Klavier nor Simon were anywhere to be found. Ema had heard someone else ask about them, and the drummer had deflected with an excuse about some magazine or another.
He’d done his best not to get upset, but…

But dammit, he’d been in the same room as Klavier Gavin. Not only that, any suspicions he’d had about Klavier’s well-being had been cemented during the show. He hadn’t wanted to see Klavier because of his stupid, unwavering crush (or the way his heart fluttered every time he thought of what it’d be like for Klavier to look at him again, or how he felt short of breath just even listening to his pure, clear voice), or for an autograph. He’d wanted—needed—to see Klavier Gavin because he couldn’t shake the feeling of worry that ate away at him. Even now, a full day after the concert, Apollo could still feel his ears ringing and the same adrenaline that had seared through his veins, leaving a sore absence in their wake.

On the night of the concert, Ema must have felt Apollo’s anger boiling in him, because she’d towed him away with a muttering ‘you can text him tomorrow’, and they’d called it a night. They’d gone back to Ema’s place first, and then the cabbie had taken Apollo back to his secluded home. He’d only had the presence of mind to strip down to his boxers and plug in his phone before falling into his bed, curling around one of his pillows and closing his eyes. Ema had been the smart one in wearing earplugs to the concert; Apollo had stayed up for at least an hour, trying to stop his brain from replaying the concert over and over in his head, and his ears from ringing. He’d finally drifted off after his mind had replayed the entirety of their encore.

In the morning, feeling much like a dog with his tail between his legs, he’d asked Ema for Klavier’s contact. She’d been surprised, to say the least. Apollo hadn’t really wanted to admit that he’d deleted the man’s number after he’d failed to return his initial texts. After the Misham trial, he’d sent a few weak attempts at conversation, but when Klavier had failed to return any of the messages, he’d gotten frustrated and figured it’d be easier if he didn’t have the temptation staring at him. At least… that’s what he’d told himself. Admittedly, his phone had felt heavier when he’d re-entered the phone number and sent a terse ‘Hey. It’s been a while. When do you leave Khur’ai?’.

Honestly, he’d been offended when Klavier hadn’t immediately responded. Sure, Apollo had woken up at a time Klavier probably hadn’t seen in months. Sure, it was possible Klavier had done the same to his contact.

But something in that moment, in that time, had felt so primal to Apollo that Klavier’s lack of response had eaten away at him until he’d had to put the phone out of sight. He’d stayed in his boxers all day, and opened a bottle of wine for himself (gifted to him, as always, from Ema) in the evening. When the bottle was empty, he’d crawled into bed again, and slowly waited for his ears to stop ringing.

An ashamed part of him didn’t want to admit that he’d spent the time staring at his phone, waiting (stupidly) for a response. Eventually he’d tossed his phone back behind the clock and rolled over.

Even though he’d done little in the day, he’d been exhausted. More emotionally exhausted rather than physically, but he couldn’t help but feel like he was wiped either way.

So, he was decidedly not going to let someone ruin his sleep. He’d earned it.

Besides, it was a Monday. Technically. Mondays were for catching up on the crime that had happened over the weekend, sitting with Nahyuta in the palace gardens while Rayfa worked on some sort of queenly task or another. They’d select which cases they’d work on that week, and then split until the next day, when the first trial would take place. They’d work different cases, or maybe the same case (if it was particularly messy) until Saturday afternoon, if necessary. It was a good way to get on the same page with the ‘opposition’. If that’s what Nahyuta could really be called. While the rest of capitalist America had taught him to hate Mondays, Khura’in had taught him to love them.
The phone buzzed to life again, and Apollo groaned, louder. He was more awake, now, and as much as he wanted to curl up and go back to sleep, the incessant buzzes seemed to penetrate into his head.

_For fuck’s sake_, he thought. _Am I hungover? Really?
Again?_

Against his will, Apollo’s eyes blinked open, and the white light from his bedside clock greeted him with the time.

6:30 AM.

He’d been asleep for a solid four hours.

Backlighting his clock, his phone rattled, and he tucked away his face again. His alarm was set for seven. He had half an hour left, dammit, and he wanted that time for **himself**.

The rattling on the nightstand didn’t necessarily get louder, but now that he was aware of it, it seemed to buzz throughout his whole body. The more he tried to ignore it, the louder it became.

_Oh, what the hell. I’m already awake._

He rolled on top of his pillow, trapping one arm under himself as he reached for the night stand. He closed his eyes again, propping himself up on the trapped elbow, trying to let his fingers see for him behind the clock and—

He’d moved too far, and his elbow gave out underneath him. He crashed back into the pillow, closer to his phone, but face smushed into the downy cushion. He groaned again, trying to contort his hand down to try and grab his stupid, annoying phone—

Finally taking hold of it, he placed his thumb on the fingerprint reader and swiped to the right, answering the call without looking.

“**mmApollo Justice,**” he muttered, trying to get his voice to cooperate. “How can I—,”

“Justice-dono.”

The voice shook Apollo awake, and his eyes snapped open. Even without the weird honorific, he’d—

“Simon?”

“You’re awake.”

He closed his eyes tighter, shaking his arm in an attempt to free it from underneath himself and rub his tired eyes.

“Hardly,” he murmured. He wouldn’t call…whatever his state was…awake. “Do you know what time it is, Blackquill?”

“It’s exactly six thirty-two.”

“Yeah,” he finally freed his arm and brought it around so he could rub the insides of his eyes. “What—,”
I’ve been waiting for a more appropriate time to call.”

Apollo frowned, his hand stilling. He could feel the leftovers of his hangover drain away. “Waiting?” That assumed that Blackquill had been awake for a while. Apollo wouldn’t call himself an expert at Simon Blackquill’s mannerisms, but— “Why?”

“There’s been a murder.”

A fraction of a second passed between Simon’s statement and the rest of his sentence, but Apollo already knew how it would end. He knew he heard the words come out of Simon’s mouth, but a bigger part of him had trouble believing it. He froze, hand over his eyes, which were now wide open. He couldn’t see the inside of his hand. He could just see Klavier Gavin, on the stage, staring down at the set list as if he were reading his own order to be executed. Were it possible for his soul to leave his body in that moment, it would have.

“I’ll be right there,” he said over Simon, pushing himself up and out of bed, wide awake.

The world pounded around Klavier Gavin as he sat—no, as he was seated in the uncomfortable chair. The guard who’d chaperoned him there left without so much a word. Could he hear the world pounding? If he could, he made no sign of it. Trying to dull it, Klavier squinted against the bright lights and lowered his head. He was overheating. At least his hands were. They were clammy against one another, but the cold handcuffs around his wrists kept him from really separating them. He’d tried wiping his palms on his clothes, but there was little he could do to dry them out. His nose ran, and when he sniffled, he almost felt like glaring at the guard and insisting that—no, he was not crying. He refused.

But his eyes were watering so badly.

Try as he might to blink away the tears, they kept coming. His nose ran like he’d been crying for ages, and though the tears weren’t constant, they still stained his face.

They’d been coming for hours, now. He remembered flashes of the day before; being ushered —thrown, he thought—into a small, beige-painted room with a blanket and—and he hadn’t been wearing the maroon scrubs when he’d last been conscious, had he…?

He squeezed his eyes together more tightly, gritting his teeth against the dull ache in his head. He could remember things. He would remember things.

Think, Klavier, think—

His stomach rolled, and he slid the chair back just enough to retch into the garbage can they’d left for him below the table. He dry heaved a few times, coughing after each try to empty something into the can, but each time, he ended by just spitting some bile out. He coughed again, leaning his forehead solidly on the table.

Remember. Remember what happened.

He remembered being woken up this morning. Shuffled out of his little room. Brought to this other —duller—room. In handcuffs. Why were there handcuffs?
His stomach rolled again, and his deltoids felt like they’d separate from the rest of his arm, and turn into gnarly shoulder pads. His insides lurched at the same time, and he balled his hands into fists. That hurt his wrists where the handcuffs had him, sure, but he didn’t care. At least he could feel something other than the rising need inside him.

Focus. Why are there handcuffs?

Before he’d woken up this morning, he’d been in that little beige room. He remembered food, water, and someone checking his pulse. Then they’d pumped his stomach. Fuck, he could remember it now, and he gagged just at the thought. Stop thinking about it, he begged. What happened next. Think about that. He’d been given something to—for—

His head pounded again, and he lightly beat it against the table to try and rattle something loose.

He’d been given something. And that had made hell come for him.

After he’d taken whatever the nurse had given him, he’d been fine for an hour or so, but then he’d exploded in a wake of sheer awareness. He’d been on-and-off vomiting since, and were it not for the toilet in the corner of the room, he was sure he’d have shat the entire floor brown. He’d done little more than stumble to the toilet, back to his bed, and then try to keep whatever the nurse brought him down before the next wave came and hit him like a freight train.

They’d changed the scrubs he was wearing a few times. First they’d been beige. He’d…he’d done something to make them not beige anymore. Now they were maroon.

Before then. Before was—was—

Klavier’s stomach fell again, and this time, he didn’t feel sick.

Right. Stein.

The world crashed to a halt in that moment, and he felt his entire being deflate.

His head pounded against Thor’s hammer in that moment, trying to remember what had happened. It was all such a blur—fuck, he’d had too much—

He remembered screaming, and then someone grabbing him by the shoulders and towing him out of the way. There was a lot of shouting after that, and people crying. He could remember the impressions of sounds, but the faces—the faces were gone. The rest of the night was gone, too.

Except for the handcuffs.

He’d hardly understood what was happening when the officer had placed them on him. Even this morning, when he’d been towed out of his bed and handcuffed again, it had taken him a minute to realize that, no, the guard was not being kinky. They’d led him here, and now—

As the thought came careening back to him, he rolled his head to the side, trying to find a cold place to try and wipe away the sweat clinging to his forehead. The sudden change in temperature turned his insides again, and he did his best to cradle his abdomen, bringing his hands as close to his stomach as possible and curling his knees closer to himself. His heart pounded in his chest, and as enough of him sobered up to understand what was happening, he felt his entire body go weak.

He was handcuffed because they thought he’d killed Stein.

Again, the nausea turned, and he started forward, barely finding the garbage can in time to retch into
it. Whatever they’d given him the night before was long gone, and he coughed against the dry heaving.

The door across from him swung open as he coughed, though the loud bang it made against the wall hardly had the effect his visitor wanted it to. Caught up in his own endless coughing, Klavier snapped his mouth shut and tried to calm his insides down enough to talk. The agony of it all ripped a hoarse groan from his lips. He assumed that’s what the new visitor wanted to do. Didn’t everybody want to talk to him? Was it not enough for him to sit in silence for two minutes and try to feel…normal?

*Normal with your pills,* a part of him sneered, and he managed to choke down another bout of coughing. He let his head hang slack for a few precious seconds, wincing against how true the statement was. He hadn’t felt normal without them for… *Shit, Klavier. How long have you been taking them?* Even now, his hands itched against sweaty palms, trying to get the feeling—the need—out of his head. Try as he might to pinpoint when he’d started relying on the drugs like he did at the moment, he couldn’t *actually* place his finger on it.

So, instead, he kept his head bowed, wishing in vain that if he stayed like that, he could sink into the floor.

“Klavier Gavin.”

The voice above him was cool. In his head, it had the same gray hue as a fresh snowfall. It was the kind of voice that bled calmness from every corner. The kind of voice that could read a heinous autopsy report and still manage to calm a thrashing child.

The same kind of voice Kristoph had.

It stung his ears.

The sound of a file hitting the table in front of him startled him, but the thought of lifting his head felt like *such a chore.* He squeezed his eyes shut tighter, hoping against hope that it would make the room stop spinning.

Fabric rustled above him, and he could imagine the detective—or whoever it was—standing above him crossing their arms over their chest.

His mind provided his brother’s tilted head.

“The rockstar, the prosecutor, the—again—rockstar, and now the murderer.”

This time, it was his chest that squeezed, as if an invisible hand had torn through his sternum and grabbed hold of his heart. It still beat like a wild man in its cage, but with each and every throb, he felt more and more like it would explode. Finally, as if it had been waiting its turn, the image of Stein, lying dead on the Khura’in stage, ripped into his mind, and Klavier choked back a sob.

“No witty comment?” The voice asked. “I’ve read the official records of the trials you prosecuted, and you always seemed to have something to say. The Holy Mother knows I was quite looking forward to a proper quip from you.”

*Shut up,* he thought, head pounding. *I’d like to see you try with a headache like this.*

The chair across the table from Klavier squealed as it was pulled out, but they didn’t sit. The sound was almost enough to tear his eardrums, and finally, *agonizingly,* Klavier raised his head, squinting to see in the awful fluorescent light.
His hands, dangling between his legs under the table, clenched into fists again, and he felt his entire jaw tighten.

He’d seen this man before. In the…in the courtyard. He was…

A prosecutor.

The weight of the world replaced itself on his shoulders, and he felt himself wilt. The reality of it all crushed him.

The man with the long braid stood with hands crossed primly behind his back, thighs lightly touching the chair he’d pulled out in order to get Klavier’s attention. Somehow, with an unseen wind, the tenne scarf rippled around his head. Klavier stared at him, trying to decide if he should focus on how the tenne scarf billowed, or what he’d just been asked. They stared at each other, sizing one another up in the suddenly silent interrogation room. Klavier forced himself to look away from the scarf, and back over at the man, who hadn’t moved.

“I…” he said—fuck, his voice was so hoarse—He tried clearing his throat, but it was so, so dry. He needed…

“Water?” The man asked, and Klavier all but burst into tears at the thought. His entire being felt like it had calcified after the last round of retching. It didn’t matter if the water didn’t stay down; he needed something.

“Bitte,” he rasped, and a slim eyebrow rose on his forehead. He made a gesture with one hand and a guard stepped forward. Klavier recoiled at the realization that they weren’t alone, but the gratitude he felt toward the water in front of him superceded his initial discomfort. Awkwardly raising his cuffed hands, Klavier reached forward and firmly cupped the glass with both hands, tilting it up to drink what was inside.

At first, the water felt like it was going to clear his skin, defeat his enemies, and save his life.

The second gulp dredged up the same thought Klavier had been fighting since they’d started the tour.

This won’t make anything go away.

He forced himself to keep the water in his mouth, and instead of trying to place it back down on the table, he cradled it against his chest and stared across the table. Silence stretched between them. Somewhere, in the back of his mind, Klavier remembered standing where that man stood. He remembered waiting in the same silence, trying to get the suspect to talk first. If they could do that, if they could get the suspect—no, the criminal—to speak first, the little win meant the entire world.

So Klavier followed that old instinct, forcing himself to sit up, even when the water hit his stomach and it rolled again. He let out a labored breath to try and keep it from flooring him, squeezing his eyes shut again. His knuckles turned white around the poor glass.

“I’ve heard the drug they give to those who have overdosed isn’t pleasant,” the man offered, and Klavier allowed himself a crooked smile.

Fifteen-love, Klavier Gavin leads.

“You should try it sometime,” he muttered. As awful as the cold water felt in his gut, he had to admit that it was sobering him up. It was awkward, and he hated every minute of it, but he forced himself to take another drink. He swallowed hard, frowning. When he’d thought he was sobering
up yesterday, it usually resulted in an awful ten minutes in the bathroom, clinging to the trash bin for
dear life while trying to keep his backside on the toilet. The glass empty, he leaned forward and
placed it back on the table.

“I think I’ll pass.”

A belch gurgled its way up Klavier’s esophagus, and he lifted the back of his hand to his mouth to
try and blow it away. Sure, he was sobering up.

Now if someone wanted to tell his stomach that….

“You must know why you’re here,” the man finally gestured, and another man, this one in the attire
of a detective that had already been through too much for one day (navy blue pants, dress shirt rolled
to his sleeves, red tie around his neck loosened) entered and sat in the chair he’d pulled out. The first
man, the prosecutor, stepped to the side, examining himself in the one-way mirror. “We found your
bandmate, Stein Way, bludgeoned to death backstage after a concert, and you standing over his
body.” Klavier pursed his lips together again, lowering his eyes to the table. The detective flipped
the file open and frowned at its contents.

“I didn’t kill him,” Klavier croaked, staring at his hands. No…I couldn’t have. Not Stein.

“The report says you hit him over the head with your guitar after the show,” the detective said, and
Klavier felt the earth fall away from him.

“My…guitar?” He asked, unsure what else he could say.

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“No, I needed to use the bathroom—I…”—Guter Gott, Klavier, get it together, they’re serious
—“…can’t remember what happened after that.”

“Let me assist with that,” the detective took one more photo out of the file before flipping it shut
again, and then crossed his arms on the table in front of him. Klavier blinked at him. He knew what
would be there when he looked down. A short, sharp breath in kept him glaring at the detective.

“You finished the concert and tried going to the meet and greet afterward.”
He remembered that. *Do not look at the photograph. If you look down you’ll be playing into their hands.*

“You were mad because your manager had made your bandmates babysit you all day so you wouldn’t get high again. But they must have let you alone for a minute and you took the chance. You showed up to the show high, and got in a fight with Stein about it. You *stayed mad* at Stein throughout the show.”

*Nein,* Klavier insisted. “I was not mad at him during the show.”

“Because you were too far gone to remember *why* you should be mad at him,” the prosecutor added, and Klavier let out a long hissing breath, glowering at him from where he sat.

*But dammit, if they aren’t good.*

“You left the meet and greet early to ‘go to the bathroom’.” He lifted his hands just for a moment to accentuate the phrase with air quotations. “Sometime while you were in there, Stein left the meet and greet to check on you. He must have found your stash—,”

Klavier squeezed his eyes shut, clenching his fists again. The pain marginally helped with the spinning room. *Not Stein. No. I couldn’t have…could I?*

“—because when you went to find it, it was gone. You had a confrontation in the hallway with Stein. He broke away from you and went to the stage.”

*Nein,* Klavier whispered, silently begging everything to just stop.

“You followed him. Probably to talk him out of sending you back to the hospital.”

*Nein, no, no, no…”*

*I’m not a murderer. I’m not.*

“He wouldn’t listen. You kept at him, but this show was important, and Stein didn’t want to see his friend keep destroying his life.”

*Bitte, please, listen—,”*

“So he didn’t listen. You got mad and grabbed your guitar.”

He screamed at his mind, digging deep to try and remember *something.* It was just all *so fuzzy*…he could remember the hallway, and getting angry about his stash…

*But murder does run in the family.*

“He went to go find another one of your bandmates, and you couldn’t let that happen.”

*Fuck,* Klavier’s eyes shot open.

“And you killed him. You tripped and fell in your stupor, and when you’d picked yourself up, you’d forgotten what had happened, so you called for the medics.”

He stared in front of himself, a new set of tears—these ones not withdrawal-induced—touched his cheeks. *Am I…?*

*Breathe,* Klavier, a voice told him, and he tried, but it did little to make him feel better. He tried over
and over again, short little breaths.

They made the room spin again. Forgetting about the picture, Klavier looked to the table to try and stabilize himself.

In front of him, still on the table, lay the photograph of Stein’s body, head turned to the right, arms out to their sides. His skull was cracked open, and the flash had made the brain inside gleam, but Klavier couldn’t focus on that at the moment.

He could only focus on the lifeless eyes staring forward, covered in blood from the spray.

“Until we found you there, screaming bloody murder, chock full of so many drugs you didn’t even know your name.”

It... fuck, did I kill him?

Klavier’s stomach rolled at the thought, and he pitched forward again, violently emptying the bit of water he’d drunk into the trash can.

“I don’t care if he’s sick or if he’s doing backflips,” Simon leaned heavily on the two hands he’d placed on the counter in front of himself. The receptionist, petite though she was, frowned up at him. “The visiting hours are clearly posted. I want to see him.”

“Mister Gavin is—,” she bit back another ‘sick’ before it came out. Her mousy brown hair was pulled back into a loose bun. As Simon loomed over her post, another strand fell out. “He’s in interrogation right now.”

“When will he be out?”

Her frown deepened. It was early in the morning; too early for any proper interrogations. Simon would have never signed off on it in the States, no matter if the addict they’d arrested had over 24 hours to come off his high.

…Okay, maybe he would have.

“I can’t divulge that information to the public.”

No, he absolutely would have.

“I’m a prosecutor,” he tried explaining to her again. “In the United States. My name—,”

“Is Simon Blackquill,” she interjected, actually brightening at the information. “I saw you two nights ago at your show. You were amazing—,”

“I’m a prosecutor,” he insisted, but she raised an unimpressed eyebrow.

“You don’t look like a prosecutor.”

He blinked at her. Sure, he hadn’t dressed up for the day, but it wasn’t like he was wearing those damn Winnie the Pooh pants again. He looked over his shoulder; Dee was still standing outside, her phone pressed to her ear and arms crossed tightly over her chest. She had taken the news of Klavier’s arrest the hardest, and trying to do damage control amidst it all...

“Do you have your badge with you?” The woman behind the desk finally relented, and he blinked down at her.
“My what?”

“Your badge,” she repeated. “You know... your Prosecutor’s Badge?”

He kept blinking, and had to bite back an ‘of course I do’ before he felt the back of his pants. Looking over his shoulder again, he only found his phone and wallet in the back pockets. Taka, returning from the errand Simon had sent him on, returned, flapping his wings to soften his landing. His talons were empty, as was his beak. He felt his insides fall. 

“Dammit Justice, where are you?”

“This is ridiculous,” he muttered.

“I can’t let you in without it,” she went on. “But, I do have my copy of your album—,”

“Fine,” he muttered, a thought arising in his head. He turned away from her. “I won’t keep pestering you. I doubt the prosecutors here would want to see how it’s done, anyway.”

She said something in return, but movement outside caught his attention instead. From the direction Taka had flown came a flash of red upon a mint green bicycle. The bike careened down the hill outside, around the barriers of the parking lot, and up to the first row of cars from the door. Simon stepped away from the desk, taking three long strides to the entry and pushing the glass door open.

Apollo Justice hardly broke step dismounting from his bike, swinging one leg over the seat and picking up the pace to the door again. Once he’d landed, he pushed the bike into the rack on the right side of the doors before his eyes finally flicked up to meet Simon’s. He was shorter than Simon remembered, but then again, they’d only met a few times; besides, that wasn’t what really caught his eye.

Apollo’s expression was darker, too. Something had happened while in Khura’in. The lines under Apollo’s eyes were also deeper, denoting long nights and early mornings trying to rebuild an entire justice system. Simon quickly updated his mental log of the man. Were it not for the signature hairstyle and red suit, he’d have a harder time trying to believe they were one in the same.

“How is he?” Apollo asked from where he stood, still close to his bike. A bag was strapped to the back, but he made no move to dislodge it. Simon pursed his lips together. Dee had turned at the defense attorney’s arrival, still speaking softly with whoever was on the other line. To anyone else, the question might have been harmless, but Simon could read the deeper meaning behind it.

Do you think he did it?

He gave the slightest shake of the head, and Apollo seemed to relax. The fists he’d curled his hands into at his sides loosened, at least.

He continued to stare up at Blackquill for just a moment, bracing himself. The lump that had grown in the back of his throat splintered on the way down when he swallowed it, the thought that had haunted him the entire way to the detention center leaving a bitter aftertaste.

I should have texted him as soon as I knew they were in Khura’in. I should have called. I should have done something.

His eyes fell from Blackquill’s, and he took a deep breath in.

Thinking like that now wouldn’t help Klavier. The only thing that would was...

Simon didn’t believe that Klavier was guilty. He could start with that.
Apollo turned and released the bungee cords holding his backpack to his bike. Once it was free, he threw the messenger bag’s strap over his head, placing a hand on the strap where it met the bag and turning back to the man holding the door open.

“Thanks,” he nodded up to him, stepping around Simon and into the detention center lobby. Michiko blinked at his entrance, standing straight up and pushing her fine hair behind her ears. It was always falling out of the bun she tried styling it into.

“M-Mr. Justice!” She stood up straighter. “You’re here, I—,”

“I’m here to see the man that was admitted here on Saturday night?” He asked in Khura’inese, stepping up to the counter. He tried to ignore the look of stupefaction on her face as Blackquill stood behind him. He could only imagine the pair they made.

“Saturday night?” She asked, finally breaking her gaze from Simon and looking back to Apollo. “We didn’t have anyone come in on Saturday night.”

“Over the weekend, then?” He asked, raising an eyebrow. Please, please don’t make me say his name right now…

“We had a few,” she nodded absently, as if he were finally asking the right questions. She turned to the logbook on her desk. “Which one are you here to see? Or is it all of them again?”

Apollo’s tongue cleaved to the roof of his mouth, and he placed the hand not on his bag on the counter in order to steady himself.

“I—,” his voice broke. Get it together, Justice! “I-I’m here to see Klavier Gavin?”

Behind the counter, Michiko stopped flipping through info cards, and she looked up at him. Her eyes flitted to Simon and then back again.

After—somehow—talking Simon into staying in the lobby, Apollo followed Michiko through the back hallway to the visiting room. He followed the usual routine; hand over his bag for inspection, walk through the metal detector once—twice—nope, three times, then hold out his arms while the guard waved his wand over him.

“When are you getting that fixed, Li?” He asked the man that handed him back his bag. The guard shrugged.

“Soon, I hope,” he sighed. “How’d you get that big guy to stay out in the lobby?”

Apollo shrugged, accepting the bag. Li was about to let go when he answered, “Simon and I go way back.” Li stared at him, dumbfounded. Apollo shrank, an eyebrow rising on his forehead. “Let me guess, you’re into their stuff?”

“No, but my boy is,” he said, finally releasing the bag. “Do you think you could get me an autograph?”

“Probably?” He answered it more like another question. “Look, I should—, ”

“Right, right,” Li waved his hands as if to dismiss the subject. “I suppose you and Mr. Gavin go way
back, too. He’s in room number four.”

He gave a noncommittal shrug and turned down the hallway. “More than you know,” Apollo muttered under his breath, waving his thanks as he moved to the room. He bit his lips together, stopping with one hand on the handle and the other holding the strap across his chest with white knuckles. The lock on the door buzzed open, allowing him passage into the dank room beyond.

At least, in his time in Khura’in, the government had improved their detention center. Instead of a little room off the palace for holding criminals before they were executed, now they had a full facility for those in between their initial arrest and processing. The visiting rooms weren’t quite so bleak, but they certainly had a certain feel of...hopelessness to them, still. He’d grown used to it. It reminded him more of the visiting rooms back in the States, at least. If it had been built closer to the courthouse, maybe he’d have saved time on bicycle trips over the years, but he figured it helped keep him in shape. He moved to the chair waiting for him on his side, lifting the bag off his shoulder and setting it on the ground as he sat. The red pants he’d almost worn straight through did little to protect him from the cold plastic chair. He shuddered. He’d rarely gotten to the detention center so early in the morning. Usually he met his clients at the courthouse, or he’d start the day with a quick look around the crime scene.

Don’t show up, a part of him wished, and he took another deep breath. He could do this.

He was Apollo Justice.

“I’m fine,” he murmured. “I’m fine, I’m fine, I’m fine, I’m—;”

A loud buzz came from the other side of the glass panel separating the room into halves. He jumped, watching through the glass as the door on the other side swung open, and a guard stepped inside. The guard moved to the side of the door, where he would stay, and there was a long pause before a figure followed.

The figure stood with shoulders drooped and head bent, hands cuffed together around a wastebasket, dressed in maroon scrubs and sticky socks instead of shoes, but nevertheless, Apollo forgot to breathe.

He could have spent years preparing for this exact moment, but it would have all been for naught. No amount of staring at pictures, or listening to his albums, or standing across from him in court would ever change the way that Apollo’s heart squeezed every time his eyes landed on Klavier Gavin. The feeling started in his gut, bubbling up into his chest, and sneaking under his ribcage just in time for his heart to beat. Every time, it would beat just harder than the others.

It only happened the first time the man walked into a room; he had that effect on people. But this...this wasn’t something Apollo ever wanted to share with anyone else.

And, for a while, he’d been okay knowing that the feeling would never be returned.

Now, he pushed himself to his feet, watching as the guard behind Klavier guided him to his seat, took the wastebasket from him, set it on the floor next to his feet, and removed the handcuffs from his wrists. Apollo nodded his thanks to the guard before he left, shutting the door on his way out to stand on the other side. He watched the door close, letting the air around him still before he forced his eyes away, down to the man sitting in the chair opposite his own.

Reminding himself to unclench his fists, Apollo took his seat again, trying to discreetly wipe the sweat from his palms as he watched Klavier from across the way.
For as much as the man could make Apollo’s legs weak, he’d had a rough go since he’d been arrested.

His cheeks were more sunk in than Apollo remembered from the pictures online, and his cheekbones looked like they could pierce through the skin if he contorted his face a certain way. His hair fell limp around his face, dry and unkempt, shielding Apollo from being able to see his eyes. Goosebumps stood straight up on his tan skin. Klavier leaned forward with his elbows on his knees, a faint whimper coming through the holes punched in the glass. The longer Apollo watched him, the more he realized that the man wasn’t trying to breathe, he was…shivering?

Apollo pushed himself to his feet again.

“Hey, can we turn up the heat in here a little?” he asked the guard, who didn’t move his head to even acknowledge his presence. He turned his attention back to the doubled over Klavier. When his chest contracted this time, it wasn’t due to a years-long marathon of pining. It was trying to hold him back from breaking through the glass himself to try and warm Klavier up himself. The man shuddered again, and Apollo raised a fist to lightly bang the glass. “Hey, a blanket? Anything?”

Klavier groaned again from where he sat. “Ach, bitte, Herr Forehead,” he muttered. “Ich bin kein Fisch in einer Schüssel, there’s no need to bang on the glass.”

Apollo felt his stomach flip at the old nickname, and to add insult to injury, Klavier pushed himself back up straight to fix him with a grin. It was marred by the dark purple circles that had formed around his eyes, but it was the grin Apollo had nonetheless missed.

Thump.

Apollo ignored the way his bracelet constricted on his arm, the same way he ignored the skip in his chest, opting instead to stare down at the rockstar. His mouth was pulled up on a stupid, obnoxious, perfect grin, but the mirth fell flat before it could reach his eyes. Tear stains marred his cheeks, and his eyes were red from the constant water flow. Before he could enter the hyper-focus mode to look for the man’s tic, Apollo blinked down at him, opening and closing his mouth a few times, trying to think of a response.

“See?” Klavier pointed at him, “Fisch in einer Schüssel!” He sucked in the sides of his mouth, puckering his lips out and raising his hands to either side of his head. Apollo watched him start moving his hands flat against the sides of his head and back out again a few times, trying his damnest not to stare as Klavier worked his lips open and closed.

Like a fish, dummy, he thought, closing his eyes and fighting a laugh at the pantomime. He said he’s not a fish in a…probably a bowl?

“You,” he managed to get out, “are unbelievable.”

When he reopened his eyes, Klavier was staring up at him, eyes wide and lips parted, eyebrows quirked in a silent question.

And now you’re speaking in Khura’inese, he realized belatedly. Look who’s the pot calling the kettle black.

“Per….haps we can try again in English?” Apollo asked, a nervous chuckle betraying him.

Klavier blinked out of whatever stupor he’d been in, letting his hands fall back to his lap and nodding, dumbly. “Ja, ja—,” Apollo stopped from where he’d been seating himself again on the other side of the glass to fix him with a tired expression. “…I mean yes. Sure.”
Apollo allowed himself a victorious smile and pulled the chair back underneath himself. When he looked back up, Klavier looked...much the same, but also....different. His eyes, instead of the hollow, lifeless tint they’d had, held something...new. Something soft.

It was gone in an instant, Klavier’s eyes closing and face contorting into a pained frown. He took in a sharp breath, leaning forward again. When he straightened a moment later, his forehead was slick with sweat. There was a slam of elbows on the table as he threaded his fingers through the short hair and pulled, wheezing for air again. Apollo recoiled. He’d seen people go through withdrawal on TV, sure, but never in real life...

“This—,” Klavier managed to grind out between a shaky exhale, “is not how I wanted this to go.”

This? Apollo’s eyebrows quirked up, and after working his mouth for a few tries to get the words to come out, he finally found his vocal chords. “What are you talking about?”

Klavier shuddered. “S-seeing you again. I—” he groaned, sobbing twice. The sobs weren’t those of someone who simply wanted to let out emotion, they came from the depths of Klavier’s being and ripped through in a frustrated, angry, fed up whimper. “Fuck, I wanted—to not be like this.”

Apollo recoiled. He’d seen people go through withdrawal on TV, sure, but never in real life...

“For lack of a better opener, he simply whispered, “Klavier—,” the man flinched at the word, ducking his head further away from the glass, and Apollo bit his lips together. Clay, you are never going to believe me when I tell you this. He sighed, simultaneously thanking his friend for the tip. He forced the frustration out of his voice, trying to stay calm. “Klav.”

Klavier stopped rocking at that, his eyes opening wide at the name. Sheepishly, he raised his eyes, one poking out from around his short hair. Apollo took a steadying breath.

“What happened?”

Klavier’s face crumpled at the question, shoulders slumping, eyes squeezing shut, and eyebrows knitting up together. His top lip disappeared with the other when he pursed them together, and when he spoke, his voice was wet with tears.

“I…can’t remember,” he whimpered. Apollo let his own eyes close, sending a quick prayer to whoever would listen for their case. “I’ve tried everything, Forehead, and—it’s all so fuzzy, I can’t—I can’t—,” He flinched, a hissing breath breaking from his lips, like he’d been threatened. He ducked his head with a shudder. “Apollo, I can’t remember fucking anything.”

Apollo straightened at the use of his name, a rogue flush turning his face red. Part of his soul, the part that lived in his chest, felt like it had been shoved by a strong wind. Thankfully, Klavier wasn’t looking. He swallowed his feelings and leaned forward on the desk in front of him. “Klav, it’s fine, just breathe—,”

“I can’t remember a thing,” he shook his head.

“Klav, I need you to just answer one question for me,” Apollo tried, firmer this time. The room was silent for a moment before Klavier finally raised his head, eyebrows quirked in a silent question. His eyes were watering again. “Did you kill him?”

Tears, real, actual tears, not the soft watering that hadn’t stopped since he’d been towed in, fell from his defeated eyes.
The silence almost crushed the defense attorney’s soul.

“I don’t know,” Klavier hissed.

“Yes or no,” Apollo shook his head. “Did you kill Stein Way?”

Klavier shuddered, and his face grew pale. His eyes, blue through and through, the whites red from emotion and a fitful night of withdrawal, darted between Apollo’s, searching for something—anything—to hold on to.

“I need to know,” he insisted. His hands balled into fists. Part of him wanted to break through the glass and shake him into remembering, but the majority of him just wanted an answer. Klavier teetered for a moment before his eyes finally settled, and Apollo let his shoulders relax. “Please. Just tell me what your heart says.”

“No.”

He said it with a slight shake of the head, but the bracelet on Apollo’s wrist didn’t budge.

*He’s telling the truth,* he thought. *Either that, or he believes it’s the truth.*

For a moment, Apollo could only stare at him.

*This isn’t how I wanted it to go,* Klavier had said.

*You and me both,* Apollo thought. He wasn’t sure *how* he’d wanted a reunion with Klavier Gavin to go. He’d always fantasized about it, sure, but…now, staring through bulletproof glass, he wasn’t sure how else they could have come together. Part of him, an ugly part that he’d always known was there, but never wanted to acknowledge, had been happy with the distance. After the Misham trial, Apollo had stared at his phone for hours, trying—and failing—to convince himself that Klavier Gavin would *not* end up like Kristoph. He’d been so *sure* that they were different, so confident before, but…

But he’d also believed that Kristoph couldn’t be a murderer.

His head spun the longer he thought about it. The guilt of that thought had pushed him to stash his phone away and focus on his work. From then on, he’d always prepared for a call like Simon’s so early in the morning. He’d hated himself for it for so long, but dammit, he’d been *ready* to get the call that Klavier had been murdered. Or he’d overdosed. Or something.

Out of his options, he had to admit, this was the one for which he’d prepared that made him the least worried.

*I believed one Gavin, and it proved to be so wrong,* Apollo thought. *But Klavier…he knows. He knows what Kristoph’s betrayal meant. He…*

*He’s not a murderer. He can’t be.*

*But I’ll never know if I walk away right now.*

“Ohay,” he finally said with a nod, and Klavier fixed him with a confused look.

“Ohay?”

“I believe you,” he went on. Klavier let out a mirthless laugh.
“So easily? Forehead—I…” he shut his eyes against a new bout of shivers. “How can you believe me? That prosecutor doesn’t, neither does that detective, hell I can’t even believe—.”

“Yeah, Nahyuta’s good at that,” he muttered, reaching down to grab his bag. “I know you, Klavier Gavin. You aren’t a murderer.”

Klavier’s eyes softened, and the same tired, emotional tears returned. Apollo steeled himself for them. He knew that he’d understood the real meaning behind the words.

_You aren’t your brother._

“So, what, you’re leaving?” He shook his head. “Do I get to wait here while you make your way to my case?”

“Make my way to—? I’m on my way to the theater right now,” Apollo met his eyes when he perked up at that. _That’s right_, he thought. He pushed himself to his feet. _Justice is gonna put some hope back in those eyes._

“But…don’t you have tons of other clients?”

“Well, yeah,” he shrugged off the overwhelming dread that accompanied his realization of just how many were waiting on him. “But…” he met Klavier’s eye. “I made room for this one.”

They stared at each other for a long moment, Klavier staring up at him, dumbfounded. Apollo found himself holding his breath.

_Was that too much? Please, Justice, keep your stupid crushes to yourself_ —

A laugh, actually on the verge of genuine happiness, jerked him out of his thoughts, and he blinked down at Klavier, who had ducked his head again. His shoulders bobbed with the chuckles.

“You’re something else, Herr Forehead,” he muttered, and Apollo felt a warm, comfortable feeling wash over him. He savored it for a moment before forcing himself to turn away.

“You should get some rest,” he finally said. “You look like you’re about to collapse.”

“That’s good to hear. I feel like I’m about to die.”

Apollo froze in the middle of slinging his bag back over his shoulder, turning sharply back to him. Klavier waved a shaking hand in front of his face, raising his head again to grin up at Apollo.

“I’m joking, obviously.”

_Thump._

The bracelet on Apollo’s wrist tightened, and suddenly, before the man on the other side of the glass could keep talking, time froze. Suddenly, through Apollo’s eyes, he could see every minute detail of Klavier Gavin. Every pore, every scratch, every pinprick…every goosebump on his tattoos. They stood out to Apollo as if he were a scientist watching a bundle of cells under a microscope.

“I’ll be fine,” Klavier continued.

_Thump._

The bracelet on Apollo’s wrist would turn his fingertips purple if he waited much longer. He squinted. There was a lie in those words, he knew it clear as day, but he’d be damned if he didn’t _finally_ find Klavier’s tic. He’d been looking for _so long_, he couldn’t let it pass now.
The words reverberated in Apollo’s mind.

“*I’m joking, obviously. I’ll be fine.*”

As they repeated themselves, Apollo’s eyes landed on Klavier’s face. He tore his eyes from Klavier’s own, and forced himself to watch his lips.

And, finally, he saw it.

*Duh, Justice. His smile.*

His bracelet loosened, and the world returned to its normal speed. Luckily, Klavier didn’t seem to notice the delay. Like always, the drastic change had only been visible to Apollo.

“Did you know that, when you’re lying,” he said without thinking, raising his hand to point at his own face, “the left side of your smile twitches up ever so slightly?” As if to accentuate the words, Apollo let his own pointer finger twitch up and down.

Klavier’s face cleared, and he blinked up at Apollo again. He’d seen the defense attorney do the same thing to witnesses, so it probably wasn’t a huge surprise that Apollo could have found his nervous tic, but…

“Was?” He asked, recoiling ever so slightly.

“Your smile,” Apollo repeated as if it were as obvious as his tattoos. “When you lie, you smile. And the left side of your mouth twitches.”

Brow furrowing, Klavier opened his mouth, but nothing came out. Apollo nicked the inside of his lip when he ground his teeth together. *Holy Mother, I’m around him for fifteen minutes and I already can’t keep it together.*

“It, uh…” he floundered for words. “It took me a long time to figure out, but I finally found it.”

It took every ounce of force for Apollo not to stare at the man’s open mouth, and his heart raced in his chest. *Now that was too much. I’m literally begging you to get it together, Justice.*

Klavier wobbled, looking like he might say something. Apollo swallowed the lump in his throat, waiting for him to respond. *Please don’t hate me, I already regret saying anything—*

“I-I should get going,” he coughed, finally turning to the door.

“Forehead, I…” Apollo stopped, turning around to face him again.

Just in time for Klavier to grunt as though he’d been socked in the stomach. His face, which had been growing paler and paler as time passed, finally turned green. In a flash, he was doubled over, and an awful retching noise came from the other side of the glass. Apollo turned his face away, choking off his own gag. He chanced a look over his shoulder, where the guard posted at the door was moving to take Klavier away.

“I’ll see you later,” Apollo called, and was answered by another loud retch. He raised a fist to his mouth to stop himself from gagging again, pushed the door open, and left.

Chapter End Notes
So the numbers are in, and Klavier and Apollo took 102,065 words to actually talk to each other. I sent the numbers to a group chat and got the two responses in return:

"Slow burn? You forgot to preheat the oven."
"I'm not sure you even have an oven tbh."

Am I proud of myself? Absolutely. You all are rockstars for bearing with these two.

End Notes

tumblr
playlist
aesthetic

Please drop by the archive and comment to let the author know if you enjoyed their work!