A Spider's Skull

by SleepDeprivedFemale

Summary

After ensuring Death and Asura have destroyed each other, Arachne adopts a wounded stray from the battlefield as her child. When her son turns out to be a Grim Reaper, however, both the remnants of the Academy and Asura's Clowns are eager to claim him, and the mother of demon weapons is trapped between saving her child or destroying an old formidable enemy.
Lady Of Gorgon (Soul Eater OST)

Chapter Notes

This is an offshoot from After Death. The idea came when going through Arachne’s profile to plan for her appearance in After Death. After that, it grew in a surprisingly exponential degree. Chapters will be shorter (~2000 words) but hopefully the updates will be every Saturday. At the time of posting this, enough chapters have been written for a consistent update schedule until mid-February.

In addition, look forward to December-February, aka Resbang posting season 2018 where I’ll be posting 2 complete stories (like I did with TRAVELLERS LOST last year).

Also I’m gonna make the chapter titles be mostly Witch House songs (with a few exceptions) because I love the genre and I also want to make life harder for myself, cheers. Heavily recommend you listen to the songs for maximum mood-setting.

Link to playlist: https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PL5NETqX6IwDY07_D49mrOgqtZ5YSSCdFS

See the end of the chapter for more notes

It was done. This was her moment of victory, her triumph over what she considered her arch rival. She, Arachne Gorgon, Mother of Demon Weapons, the Heretic Witch, could now add Destroyer of Death to her titles.

Honestly though, she found herself feeling very dispassionate about the whole affair.

Maybe it was because of how she had had her victory; some would consider using the Kishin, the one being rumored to be able to destroy Death, as cheating. After all, she was the one who had steered Asura like a homing missile into their common target, abstaining from any actual fighting, settling for plotting and sabotage.

Whatever; Arachne was used to accusations of ‘cheating’ her way through power. It wasn’t her fault other people didn’t take advantage of the opportunities presented in their lifetimes.

The old Witch shifted her attention back to her surroundings, though there was little to be seen. The land was in ruins. Demolished buildings littered the scenery, broken wood and tattered rooftops being the only indication that people once lived here. She doubted they would ever be rebuilt. Above her, the sky was a blood red, subdued to the point where she couldn’t tell if it was night or day. The stench of death permeated her surroundings, coming from mutilated corpses, with the only sign of life being the buzzing of insects.

Arachne supposed she should be glad. After all, she had just witnessed the demise of Death, the one being that she feared would be her end. The old Witch had made plenty of enemies in her long life, but none came so close to ending her as the personification of the End Of Life itself. In her darker moments, she considered losing to the Grim Reaper would be fitting. After all, no one can beat Death; or at least that’s what she believed- what she hoped was another thing entirely. But now, with this turn of events…
Arachne was torn on what to feel for what was yet to come. The power vacuum that would be created by Death’s and Asura’s simultaneous defeat would plunge the world into chaos. There would be no Death to chase down those whose souls were stuck, or those who broke the cardinal rule of consuming other souls. There would also be no Kishin for those fully invested into the Madness to pledge themselves into. Just a free-for-all battle in a continent already rife with conflict. She wasn’t sure if this conflict would spread to the rest of the world. No matter what chaos Death’s demise would bring, there would also be no Kishin to help dismantle the order. It would be a battle between the already existing powers and the oncoming chaos.

Fortunately, Arachne was not completely unprepared; the reason she had founded Arachnophobia was to establish her hold on this Earth, waiting for an opportunity like this.

Arachne wanted to rule. Not with an iron fist, like the brutes in the DWMA did. Not with driving insane anyone who opposed her, like the Kishin’s forces did. Certainly not with Chaos, like her younger sister Medusa advocated. No, the Witch liked to rule like a mother. Strict and occasionally feared, but always looking out for the good of her children. She would educate them in the cruelty of the word and teach them to fend for themselves. There wouldn’t be any obstructions, any dogmas to follow, only gentle advice from the one woman responsible for them all. Sure, sometimes you had to be strict and you had to punish children, but you loved them in the end. Even with Weapons, she only wished to provide a select few of her ‘Children’ with the means necessary for fighting against the darker elements of this Earth. Eggs had to be broken, but mothers were ruthless when it came to protecting what was theirs.

Thankfully, her goal was looking further and further away by the day. Death and the Kishin were gone, so she stood relatively unopposed. Arachne hadn’t been affected by the Madness so far as to try and take down another deity, had Death or Asura survived. With both gone though, and the only potential obstacles being that silly organisation Death had mustered…

Arachne couldn’t help but let out a small self-satisfied laugh as she observed the ruined landscape, Mosquito and Giriko by her side.

“Milady,” her manservant politely distracted her from her thoughts. “If I may, there is little to see here. Only ruins and corpses and I would hate for any of that lowly dirt to stain your lovely form.”

“You concern is appreciated Mosquito,” the Witch blankly replied. With a flick of her wrist, she opened her fan and used to obscure the bottom half of her face. “I can’t help but feel we’re wasting time here. Prepare my carriage for Baba Yaga, we must regroup and form our future strategy.”

The short man deeply bowed. “Of course milady,” he said and left to arrange their transport.

Giriko, who up to this point as occasionally kicking at some broken woodwork, gave a brief look at the destruction and scoffed. “Those bastards left nothing for me to destroy.”

“That’s truly disheartening,” Arachne dryly said but did not worry about insulting Giriko. Despite their difference in ranking, the man was notoriously informal and Arachne enjoyed being able to converse with one of her supporters in such a manner.

“It’s a crying shame, I tell ya,” the man retorted, Arachne’s dry tone going over his head.

Giriko continued complaining, but the woman paid him no heed. The witch had turned her head away from him, distraught. She swore she heard something else in the ruins.

Meanwhile, Mosquito had returned to her, bowing deeply as he addressed the Witch. “Milady, your carriage is ready.”
Indeed, a limo was parked just outside the wreckage, its luxurious appearance looking out of place with the ruined landscape. The logistics behind how that limo came to be were a mystery only Mosquito was privy to.

Arachne however, showed no signs that she had heard him. Her head was still turned to where she believed the sounds came from. The Witch took a step further towards the source of her distractedness.

Mosquito, after not having been addressed, raised his head and looked at Arachne in confusion. “Milady?”

The woman ignored the call, focusing on the unexpected sounds coming from the wreckage. She was a curious individual to a fault, always going after knowledge those older but less wise than her had deemed forbidden. This was simply a small indulgence to her second biggest character trait. There, just on the side of a broken wall.

It was a baby’s cry.

Careful and elegant, she crossed the fallen structures, never losing her composure. The sounds grew stronger, which meant she must have been getting closer.

It was when the Witch made it across a relatively debris-free clearing, where one of the many craters created during the battle were formed, that she finally saw it.

It was a child, an infant to be exact. It couldn’t be older than a few months, and it was malnourished and dirty, curled up in a pathetic ball. The sound she heard coming from it was a constant whine, much like a wounded animal.

“Oh crap,” Giriko muttered behind her. The man must have followed her. “Look at that, something did make it out alive.”

“It is not of our concern,” Mosquito scolded the young man, after having caught up to the two.

“Oh, stop being all high and mighty-”

Arachne blocked out the argument these two had. She had more important things to muse over, such as her conflicting feelings over this child. Arachne wasn’t a kind or charitable individual. That child could be a hassle to raise, growing up to be a nuisance, or just straight up dying and being a waste of effort. But there it was, a young child, parentless and alone, begging to be taken under her wing. It was right after one of her greatest adversaries had been taken down as well. Arachne wasn’t religious, quite the opposite, but if this wasn’t a sign of some sort, an indication of good fortune, then she would eat her fan.

Besides, the baby had already proven it’s a fighter. It was the only thing left alive in a sea of Death. Arachne respected that.

“Mosquito, your jacket.”

“Milady,” the man cried in surprise but obeyed. Giriko paused mid-tirade to give the Witch a confused look.

“Eh? We’re taking the squirt in, big sis?”

Arachne didn’t respond, taking her manservant’s jacket and kneeling down to the child. She scooped it up, her touch careful and gentle as she wrapped the dark cloth around the baby.
She brushed a few black strands, held together by dried blood, away from the baby’s face. Two wide golden eyes stared back.

“Mosquito, Giriko, we have a slight change of plans.” She stood up and maneuvered the bundle in her arms so that it could be seen by her two followers. “I present to you Arachnophobia’s newest member.”

A clumsy tiny hand reached for the spider-web netting in her neckline.

“Welcome to the family, little one.”

Chapter End Notes

Comments are appreciated.
“Medusa,” Arachne greeted her guest dispassionately.

“Sister,” the younger Witch replied with a feigned cheer.

"What brings you here, my dear sibling?” Arachne asked with a fake smile of her own. Two could play the ‘let’s pretend we love each other’ sister bit. Arachne found it annoying but wasn’t about to show that in front of Medusa.

Fourteen years had passed since Death’s and Asura’s demise, since she could sleep easy at night without imagining a scythe around her neck. Arachne had established Arachnophobia as one of the major powers in the continent. Though her influence was wide-spread, she had no lack of enemies and those who would wish to take Arachnophobia’s control from her. She also had alliances to maintain, at least until she could afford to take them out. Feigning loyalty to a person in which they once shared goals was not a hard task at all.

Besides, she already had a plan in place if she was brought to the brink of defeat. It was an unorthodox, but less risky than ‘successfully negotiate with an insane and paranoid being to take down Death’. Giriko and Mosquito would follow her without question. The only potential issue was the younger member of her family that was proving to be quite rebellious recently.

Oh well; she supposed that’s how teenagers acted. He should quiet down in a few years. Arachne didn’t really want to squash that rebellious spark; that would be hypocritical of her and everything she once stood for in her early life.

“Oh, is it such a weird thing for me to want to visit my older sister? We are family after all. Crona sends their greetings.”

There it was, Medusa pushing her buttons. Arachne’s nibbling was a point of contention between the two Witches. Medusa shared Arachne’s manipulative streak, but used it for all the wrong reasons.

“Let us not involve our children in this.”

“Our children? Crona is my own flesh and blood. Can you say the same, dear sister?”

Arachne grimaced but did not respond, sans hiding her expression behind her fan.

“Anyways, I’m not here for a social visit.”

“Colour me surprised. I always had you for the emotional type.” Actually, Arachne always had Medusa for the backstabbing snake type but you shouldn’t say that out loud to a family member.
There were appearances to keep after all.

The younger Witch responded with a smile of her own. “Emotional? I’m not the one picking up strays now, am I?”

“No, I’m not.” Arachne cut her off, all humour gone from her tone. “What are you here for?”

Medusa didn’t seem to mind, seeing as her smug grin never left her face. “There’s been some trouble south of the border.”

The older Witch raised an eyebrow. Trouble at Mexico was business as usual. The area housed the last remnant of that blasted Academy after all. “Mind being more specific, sister?”

“Very well. There’s rumours of them having a certain Book.”

At this, Arachne’s frame tensed.

“And they are planning to use the information inside it for something big, something that ‘will change the course of history’. Or at least, that’s what a little bird told me.”

“And you are telling me this, why?”

“Well, my dear sister, I thought we were in this together. Not to mention the rumors floating around, that Arachnophobia can’t stop a measly group of humans…”

It was a power play, Arachne realised. Medusa was challenging her authority and her power. Arachnophobia was allied with numerous smaller bands of Witches, who followed because either the Witches Council hadn’t gotten to them yet, or because they feared Arachne enough to submit but not enough to integrate. These groups employed their own unique structures -Arachne distinctly remembered one group made excessive use of pre-Kishin as enforcers- and were all pining for a chance to take a swipe at the behemoth that was Arachnophobia. Medusa herself had a small group of her own, yet she was always holed up in one of her labs doing… Arachne didn’t want to use her imagination in this case. The old Witch hoped she’d grown out of that phase. Still though, to bring such rumours up… Did Medusa have a plan? Was she the one spreading them in the first place?

Arachne clutched her fan a little tighter. The nerve!

Ah, no matter. Arachne had plans of her own, last thing she wanted was to postpone them because her younger sister decided to be a pain. After all, the Academy wasn’t that hard of a target; sad really, when you considered they were the only organised resistance. Just further proof that had the Kishin survived, the spread of the Madness would be inevitable.

“I will see to it.” She gave Medusa her most pretentious of smiles, both knowing that it was a fake. “It was lovely to see you, sister. Goodbye.”

Medusa responded with her own fake smile, and Arachne knew that Medusa did that only to rile her up. The younger Witch gave a mocking bow and started walking away from the room. “Goodbye. Hopefully we’ll see each other soon.”

In another part of the Castle, where the living quarters of Arachne and others close to her were, a young teen was sitting on a dining table, papers and books set all around him. He was well-dressed,
wearing a pristine white shirt with dress trousers held in place by brown suspenders.

A man walked in with a plate full of sausages. He gave the boy a look and walked over to him. “Oi, kid. Watcha working on?”

“Math,” the boy responded, not looking up from his work.

“Oohh.” Giriko hissed. “You’re on your own buddy. I lost it when they started introducing letters.”

“I’m surprised you didn’t give up when you had to use double digits,” a shorter individual with a very pronounced nose interrupted the man. Mosquito crossed his arms in irritation when he saw the plate Giriko was carrying with him.

“Oi, you looking for a beating old man?!”

“The arrogance! A young thug such as you cannot compare to my form from 100 years ago-!”

“While this conversation is lovely,” the teen interrupted the two in a dry tone, “would you mind taking it somewhere else? I’m trying to focus.”

Giriko let out a low whistle. “Ah hell, you’re acting more like big sis by the day-”

Giriko’s remark was cut short by a poke by Mosquito. “But of course, young master. We would not want to disrupt your studies now, would we?” The short man grumbled the last part, aimed at the blonde.

“What are you two fighting about now?” A regal female voice came from the entrance of the study.

The boy looked up from his work, while Giriko and Mosquito stood at attention.

“Milady!”

“Boss!”

“Mother.”

“At ease,” she said with some humour in her voice. “So, Giriko and Mosquito, why are you two trying to kill each other this time?”

“Milady! If I may, Giriko here was distracting the young master from his studies. I attempted to politely silence him, but the brute only insisted in causing a mess-“

“Oi, that’s a big fat lie if I ever heard any! I was just having a conversation with the kid when you had to come in and be a smartass-!”

The two continued their squabbling, causing Arachne to look away in resignation. Meanwhile, the boy had returned to his homework, scribbling over a particularly tricky Calculus problem.

Arachne opened her fan and hid her expression behind it. She looked over at the boy.

“Thanasi?”

The boy ignored the call, too preoccupied by his work.

“Thanasi?” Arachne repeated.
No response.

Arachne sighed. “Kid?”

This time, the boy responded by turning his head around. “Mother? You called me?”

“Many times.”

“Oh.” The boy looked away. “Uh, I didn’t realise.”

Arachne sighed again. “No matter.” She had to get used to this idiosyncrasy some time anyways.

She had tried to give the child a proper name. She had spent quite some time trying to come up with an appropriate one. The problem was her child didn’t respond to it, or any other name in general. The only names he did respond to weren’t even names; only ways to refer to children. Giriko had accidentally came about that discovery, when he realised the boy responded every time he said ‘Kid’ or any variation thereof.

“Since these two,” she pointed at the pair who were now resigned to giving death glares at each other, “give conflicting testimonies, would you mind sharing what happened?”

“Ah, no problem.” The teen put his pencil down. “The whole thing started when Giriko asked me what I was doing-”

“Ha! Told ya I was innocent!”

“No you didn’t, you bothered the young master-!”

“Silence, the both of you,” Arachne shut them off.

“Yes, Lady Arachne!” the pair immediately said.

The teen gave them a sideways glance but continued. “But then Mosquito challenged him.”

“Ha!”

“Giriko, what did I say?”

“Ah, sorry,” the man said, with the biggest grin on his face.

“And then Giriko took it a step further-”

The grin was transferred from Giriko to Mosquito, this time accompanied by a smug expression.

“But both are to blame, though they didn’t bother me much.”

“I see.” She turned to the two men. “Both of you, get out. I’ll call you soon.”

As soon as the two men left the room, the witch turned to the boy.

“You haven’t finished?”

“I wanted to make sure my answers are correct.”

Indeed, scribbled along the pages were instances of proof for each derivative, sometimes repeated for the same one. Fortunately there was no need to create any diagrams or charts of the sort, as Kid spent too much time on them and they always turned out… idiosyncratic, for lack of a better term.
“That’s adequate,” Arachne said with a small smile on her face. While not a prodigy, her child was no slouch when it came to their lessons. “After that, we will move on to integrals. Plus, we will expand on the uses of the Area Under Curve, for example, their application in biological models.”

Soon after that, Arachne was in one of her study rooms, report in hand. Giriko and Mosquito stood next to her, with rapt attention. The Witch was reading a report by the Arachnophobia dispatch by the border and her frown deepened by the minute.

“Was it Medusa?” Giriko asked out of the blue, breaking the silence.

“Is it that obvious?” Arachne responded, not taking her eyes off the report.

“Yeah, you’re always a sourpuss after meeting her,” Giriko said ignoring the glare both Arachne and Mosquito sent him. “What? I’m only saying the truth.”

“I do not mean to insult your family milady, but your sister’s manners are lacking,” the manservant added after much consideration.

“Medusa is young, naïve and overconfident. Her arrogance will be her demise,” Arachne stated, leaving the report on her desk. “Still, to come for me, she must be scared or at least worried.”

“Trouble, milady?”

“It’s from the Academy, as always.” The Witch tapped at the report. “My sister believes they have across a certain… source of knowledge that will allow them to turn the tables on the current state of the conflict.”

Even after the simultaneous demise of Death and Asura their respective forces, the Academy and the Clowns, had kept going at each other’s throats for the past one and a half decades. Both forces were severely weakened after the fall of their respective leaders however. The Academy had retreated further South, going from desert to the thick jungles on the southern part of the continent, while the Clowns had splintered and being moved underground, literally so in a few cases. Though Arachnophobia itself was supposedly neutral in the current conflict, the Academy despised Arachne and everything she stood for making them enemies in the same way an elephant sees an ant as an opponent. As for the Clowns… well, despite their joint research efforts, Arachne frankly had no idea what went through their fractured psyches.

“Pah, this is barely a conflict at this point. They’re a minor insurgency if anything!” Mosquito reassured her. “But surely, turn the tables? What could they possibly do at this point?”

“Hate to agree with the penguin, but he’s right,” Giriko added, ignoring the shorter man’s death glare. “Nothing they can do at this point. They’re outmatched and outmanned. What, are they gonna raise Death of something?”

“Don’t underestimate people when they are desperate,” Arachne stated as she picked up another stack of papers, suppressing the urge to knock on wood at Giriko’s words. “That being said, it shouldn’t be hard to drive the Academy further back. Giriko, gather up our troops and send an expedition. I want this to be dealt quickly. Mosquito, help him organise.”

“Oi, who’s gonna protect you and the little squirt?”

“Oh, Giriko, after all these years and you still think I am powerless?” Arachne gave him a small smile. “Don’t worry. I’ve already taken necessary precautions in case of an attack. Unless they
mobilise their entire forces, Baba Yaga will hold strong.”

The two men hesitantly nodded and obediently left the room.

After they left, Arachne reached for her glass of aged red wine. She took a small sip before her gaze fell into the entrance.

A few seconds passed in silence.

“Come in. You know I can sense you, little one.”

The door slightly opened to let the teenage boy in. He stood in attention, though his shoulders were raised defensively.

“Mother.”

“Well? Anything you would like to add? I know you eavesdropped.”

The boy looked away. “I’m sorry about that. It was rude.”

“Don’t be. Curiosity should be rewarded.”

Besides, it wasn’t like Arachne had any reasons for mistrusting Kid. The boy was tidy, organized and polite. If Arachne had any complaints, it would be that he tended to focus on details and often miss the bigger picture, occasionally to an obsessive degree. Still, often a word or two from her would be enough to bring the teen back into focus. She was his mother after all.

“I know it was Aunt Medusa who visited you.”

Arachne smiled. ‘Aunt’ Medusa. Her child was formal to a fault.

“You saw my dissatisfaction.”

“No, I sensed her soul.” At the Witch’s raised eyebrow, Kid gave her a small smile. “I get better at that by the day, though I still can’t see most souls clearly enough...”

“It’s good that you are making progress.”

“What did Aunt Medusa talk to you about?”

“That, my dear boy, is private.”

Kid tried to hide his disappointment. He should have known it wouldn’t be that easy.

Time for a different tactic. “Giriko mentioned Death.”

“You need not worry,” Arachne immediately responding, clutching her glass just a tad tighter. “Death is gone for good.”

“That’s not what I’m worried about... It’s quite the opposite.”

“Oh?” Arachne raised an eyebrow. She supposed Kid would speak to her about that sooner or later; probably another case of being contrary for the sake of it. “What is it? You look conflicted.”

“I’ve been thinking...” the boy hesitated, knowing his mother’s opinion on the topic. “Don’t you the absence of Death may have some... negative effects on the world?”
Arachne’s frown turned to a scowl. “...Explain.”

“Because… a lot of people compare the times when Death existed, and they say that things now are more complicated…”

“Complexity isn’t inherently a bad thing.”

“No it’s not that. They say that now that there is no Death, many things must change and adapt to this new world and that there are problems with making the new changes.”

“That is not unusual. It always takes time to adjust to change.”

“But what if it’s a… lethal change? What if it’s like water? Everyone would die if all the water dried out.”

Arachne resisted the urge to roll her eyes. She had some pretty crazy ideas when she was a teen too. “That’s an interesting perspective you have, my child.”

The teen was about to respond but quickly closed his mouth and was about to leave.

“There is one last thing I want to talk with you,” Arachne said, causing Kid to turn back to face her. “I have received reports of your training. Physically you are doing excellent. However, I was wondering if you were considering…”

“No.” The answer was final and left little room for interpretation.

Arachne conceded with a nod. “As you wish. I know you are as stubborn as I was in my youth.” She sighed, and muttered the next part to herself, after Kid had left. “I miss the days when you were younger. You’d be quiet, rest on my lap, and not cause that much of a fuss.”

Chapter End Notes

The name Arachne tried to give Kid is Athanasios, which means ‘Immortal/Deathless’ in Greek (going by Arachne’s name and mythos behind it, I’m assuming she’s Greek). One of the more common abbreviations of the name Athanasios is Thanasis (Thanasi when called by someone else because Greek, both modern and ancient, is grammar hell). It should be obvious why Arachne tried to name Kid that. :P

Also nibbling is a gender-neutral term for niece/nephew, you learn something new every day.

Comments are appreciated.
It was later in the evening that Arachne had finished her lessons with Kid. As soon as the woman had left the study room, Kid looked up from his workings. He closed his eyes and his expression hardened in concentration, peering into a vision few humans would ever experience.

He saw his mother's purple soul, large and powerful with spider-leg-like protrusions, make its way into Baba Yaga's main room where she oversaw Arachnophobia's operations. The child, when satisfied that his mother was far enough, quickly gathered up his things and headed towards his room.

On the way, he passed several of Arachnophobia's members. Most only had to glance at the young child's form, the particular business suit with spider related details, and they got out of the way. The older members particularly, those who had been in Arachnophobia long enough, were those who moved more hastily. Among new members, only the more superstitious ones or those easily intimidated by rumours made way; on the other hand, the brave or more reckless souls did their best to look like they ignored the child and the stories that went along with it.

Oh yes, Kid had quite the reputation. In addition to being Arachne's only officially recognised child - though many members saw her as a mother figure, none sans the boy were allowed or even had the guts to call her Mother - there were many tales that the child was... not quite safe to be around.

It all started about a decade ago, when Kid was at the age where he had gained a lot of mobility. He was small and skinny, so most members at the time did not even think that such a young and small-framed individual could attack a senior member and successfully rip their soul apart.

The stories differ in detail, but the common narrative was that an older member had been tasked with escorting the child to his mother. When the pair were several minutes late, an annoyed Arachne, along with her henchmen and a few other members, had walked back to find them. When they heard shouts and screams, the group hurried towards them only to come across a gory sight.

The hallway was bloody, rivulets of blood running across the cracks on the marble floor. The lights were dim, the flames having mysteriously died down and bathing the place in an ominous orange glow. A slumped figure, the supposed escort, was lying face down on the floor. Their clothes were bloody, their mask cracked and discarded away. The form underneath the clothes looked like someone had taken a human doll and tried to tear it apart from limb to limb, with moderate success.

And there, on the side of a hallway barely a meter away from the twisted corpse, stood the child, backed into a corner like a wild animal. His eyes were wide - someone claimed they glowed in the dim light - and he was covered head to toe in blood. Some of the red substance was his but most came from the fallen member. He staring at the spot right above the human's corpse - future retellings
universally agreed that in hindsight the boy was looking at the older member's soul.

Everyone in the group sans Arachne had gone on full alert, thinking the child had been consumed by the madness and was about to go on a homicidal spree. It wouldn’t be the first member of Arachnophobia that had done so. However, a strict command from their leader and they were told to stand down, as the Old Witch approached the child like she had just caught him stealing from the cookie jar.

The woman had called his name once, twice, before giving up and calling him Kid, the only name he would react to.

The change was instantaneous. On one moment the child looked like a scared beast; then his eyes met Arachne’s and he had buried face into the woman's dress, staining it with blood while hyperventilating.

Later on, after the child had somewhat calmed down, he had claimed that the man wanted to attack him, to eat him, and that he had acted in self-defence. What sort of self-defence would entail making a fellow human look like a broken toy, few had dared asked, and the answer they received from the boy was a confused stare. Not to mention that the deceased member was faithful to Arachnophobia, going as far as to eat the souls of their enemies to gain power and protect Lady Arachne and her reign. Sure, they knew eating souls affected your state of mind and physiology but the man’s sheer devotion prevented him from even thinking about betraying Arachne, much less her young child. Even then, the boy was too lightly wounded to show the man had made an honest attempt of attacking the child.

Among hushed whispers -since saying them out loud would put you under intensive scrutiny - it looked like the man had acted in self-defence as seen in the boy’s light wounds and that it was Kid who had attacked him first, when one accounted for the difference in strength and the severity of these wounds.

The mystery didn’t end there though. Ever since that gory incident, Arachne had limited the amount of people allowed to interact with her child; a common theme observed was that only those who had never consumed a soul would be allowed to come into contact. The rest were to keep their distance. Few had protested. Giriko and Mosquito were both allowed as well. Mosquito sustained himself on blood, being powerful enough to not need or desire to eat souls. As for Giriko, though the man was a Weapon, which meant he could eat souls at ease, Arachne had strict rules on which souls he consumed. Giriko was part of clean-up, a group of weapons that consumed the souls of members that had given into the madness and went rabid.

Since that incident, life continued without any other major happenings concerning the boy. However, there were whispers that the child was responsible partially for 'clean-up' operations in which weapons like Giriko had participated. It was as if the boy could predict which member would go rabid and preemptively order their removal. However, it seemed that in order to do that he had to occupy the same room with the person as seen in those targeted and their historical locations.

Of course that was just a rumour. However, such things often hold grains of truth within. This was why a newer member had -to her opinion- the bright idea of heeding the warning signs and quickly exiting the corridor where Kid was in favour of one of the many alternate branching paths.

Kid rolled his eyes when he saw the cloaked figure leave as soon as he entered the hallway, but he was used to such behaviours. The ridiculous rumours that he was working with Giriko's group were just as inaccurate. It was Arachne that asked him which souls that worried Kid. Though the boy was eager to list them off, the overwhelming majority were left alone, going after only one or two individuals at a time that others confirmed had gone rogue.
Neither Kid nor Arachne had any idea how he could predict such a thing, and any research done by Arachne into the boy’s heritage was unfruitful. Kid didn’t mind not knowing and had made it abundantly clear, though his mother’s curiosity only grew.

Arachne had started to suspect that Kid was a male Witch - a rare oddity, but a possibility nonetheless - but her results had been inconclusive. She had found that though Kid had power, his larger than usual soul and early manifestation of Soul Perception hinting as such, it didn’t fit within the patterns of any conventional Magic. Kid’s soul for starters, was an obvious blue, missing any of the technicolour purple hues Witches’ souls were renowned for. The boy also couldn’t recall any chant or incantation to summon his magic, the first words of all Witches, preceding even ‘mama’. Even stranger, even if there was magic, Kid couldn’t wilfully summon any of it. In the end, they made little progress in solving the mystery. What had changed though, was that Arachne was willing to teach Kid the bare bones of magic, just in case her child manifested any other powers. Until then, there was nothing she could do, as she had hit a metaphorical brick wall. Kid suspected his Mother hadn’t left the matter alone and would continue her investigations after her workdays became less hectic.

What was not so ridiculous about these rumours however was their start a decade ago. Kid may not have the best of memories but he distinctly remembered the unease he felt when he saw the man’s soul, pulsing red and oozing madness. Despite the member’s reverent attitude, Kid felt instinctively repulsed and hostile at the man, like a newbie exterminator seeing a cockroach. The boy had tried to hide his unease by keeping his face blank, but his squared shoulders and brisk pace betrayed his true feelings. The guy must have seen it too, for he had approached Kid, ignoring the boy’s body language that screamed for him to get away, and put a hand on the child’s shoulder.

This was when it all got out of hand.

A chill had gone up Kid’s spine and the boy’s senses went haywire. He had felt the man’s soul, pulsing red and oozing madness and wrong. The man must have sensed something too, since for a moment he viewed the child with bloodshot eyes. He hadn’t had any time to react though; Kid had been faster and with strength he didn’t know he had, the boy had lunged at the man and tackled him to the ground.

No matter how hard he tried, Kid couldn’t remember the next few moments. Maybe it was the adrenaline or he had been briefly overtaken by the Madness; whatever the explanation the boy found himself kneeling at a bloody body, covered in the red substance. His breaths were rapid and so was his heartbeat. He tried to stand up but then he noticed the soul, red and flaky and hungry, and the boy took a step back until he stumbled and fell with his back to a corner.

Shaking his head to dispel these thoughts, Kid entered his quarters. It was a simple bedroom with a toilet and shower room a door away. A comfy bed, a simple closet and an expansive study desk were the major objects in his room, with a chair, a nightstand and a chest making up the rest of the furniture. The walls were a mute beige, with a small window overlooking the field below the Castle. On the windowsill, there was a stand and some bird food. Ravens often came and Kid didn’t mind them.

As Kid closed the door behind him, he looked up to see a couple of ravens already at the windowsill. They were regulars, a large male and a female with shiny feathers. They let out a soft caw when they saw the boy entered, but Kid ignored them as he put his study books away under his study desk.

The boy briefly concentrated and checked with his Soul Perception that no other Soul was nearby. Then, he kneeled before his desk, getting under it and spotted a small gap between the structure and the wall. Nimble fingers reached in and pulled out an old weathered notebook. Its cover was plain
and featureless, yet the pages inside were riddled with scribbles. Kid turned off the lights in his room -after all it was late at night and he didn’t want to show he was still awake. The boy got a box of matches from one of the drawers along with a candle. He set the candle on top of the desk and lighted it up, bathing the room in a soft glow.

Then, the boy shifted his gaze on his bed. Kid’s gaze lingered, and it was only when one of the ravens crowed that the boy slowly headed there. Kid kneeled down and reached under the bed, pulling out a small cage with rats in it. He had used non-lethal traps to get them, and had been keeping them healthy for the past few days. The rodents squeaked when Kid got a hold of the cage and started running around panicked.

The boy flinched at the sound, so he moved the cage on the edge of his desk as soon as possible. The rats calmed down after Kid got out of their sight.

Grabbing hold of a pencil, Kid sat on his chair on the other edge of his study and opened up his notebooks. To the uninitiated eye, the pages were filled with doodles, complicated symbols with no meaning or thought behind them. To Kid however, they were an archive of ten years, chronicling strange and unusual phenomena, most centred around him. Ever since that incident with the Arachnophobia member, Kid had decided on keeping a detailed record of things that were ‘off’; maybe he could try and understand what happened and get some order into this chaotic word.

As for the symbols, he had come up with them on his own… he hoped. Truth be told, the language he used came to him too easily to be truly made-up. It was as if he already knew it; however, wouldn’t that already be the case if he was making up a language?

Anyways, the boy opened the pad on a certain page of the book, where one of the ages were half-written. The top symbols spelled out Soul Wavelength, and below it were accounts of general knowledge about the subject -that each Soul had a distinctive Soul Wavelength and that for certain individuals or groups, such as Witches, their wavelengths had distinct properties and could be utilised in the physical world. For example, Mother’s Soul Wavelength allowed her to have remote control of her spiders, see through their eyes, acquire knowledge, guard Baba Yaga etc. The hard part was utilizing it in the first place. Like Soul Perception, it required immense concentration and not everyone could use their wavelengths.

That was what Kid was trying to test out. So far he had only succeeded in calling upon his soul wavelength. After a month of meditation, he could feel the Wavelength manifesting between his fingertips, invisible to the naked eye but very much there, though calling upon it made him feel nauseous. After that, he had tried to see if he could extend his wavelength outwards at will, and what effects it would have on things. Inorganic objects, like walls or metal were left unchanged. During his tries however, he had noticed that a line of ants quickly dissolved into chaos and scrambled away from the boy. That kept him thinking, resulting in the rats.

Taking a deep breath, Kid focused inwards. He could feel his soul, slowly pulsing. It was hard to gather up on his Wavelength, it felt like he was trying to breathe through a plastic bag. The power came agonisingly slowly. He heard the ravens crow, this time a bit more worriedly, and scuttling noises from the cage showed the rats had been agitated again.

Walking over to the cage while not breaking his concentration, Kid opened the entrance on the top. The rats now hurried away from the hand, walking on top of one another. Kid cursed as he felt some of his concentration slipping away.

Eventually he got hold of a rat. The rodent flailed wildly and occasionally tried to bite Kid. The boy grimaced, but still didn’t release his hold on his Wavelength.
The boy sat down, the rat still in his hold. The ravens were crowing louder; the male was nervously ruffling his feathers. The candle’s light flickered.

With an exhale, Kid released his hold. The ravens jumped in place but remained at the windowsill. The candle flame fell low but regained its glow a second after. As for the rat, it went limp in Kid’s hand.

The boy opened his eyes and looked at the still rodent. His hands were shaking a bit; summoning his Wavelength always took it out from him. He carefully put it up on the desk and observed it. Its belly was moving up and down rhythmically.

It was sleeping.

Kid looked between the rat and his notebook. Eventually he settled for writing down what happened. When he finished, the rat was still sleeping soundly.

Kid poked the rat. It didn’t wake up.

After a few more pokes, the animal slowly twitched back into consciousness. Its snout began moving wildly, like it was trying to understand what had happened and Kid quickly got a hold of it before it could escape. The rat still struggled as Kid moved to put it back in the cage, maybe give it to Giriko so he could get rid of it, until he paused.

Kid still had access to his Soul Wavelength. That was strange since every time after using it he felt tired, but now it was like he had poked a small hole in the plastic that allowed his Wavelength to flow through.

He thought about it for a minute, until he found himself seated at his chair again and refocusing on his soul. The usual motions were made, the same flicker of the light and agitation of the animals. Kid ignored it as he gathered more of his Soul’s Wavelength into his hands.

In addition to the ease, Kid found he could gather a larger amount of it into his hands. His heart leaped in excitement. That meant that he could gather more, and that he was growing, not only physically but mentally as well-

His excitement was cut short when with no warning his heart clenched, the restraining feeling around his soul was back again with full force and Kid doubled forwards and choked on thin air.

The light had gone out; the ravens had left with a scared cry, hastily leaving the windowsill. On the cage, the rats screeched, bunching up into a mass as far away from Kid as the cage would allow, climbing on top of each other with disregard for personal safety.

Kid coughed up a few more times, placing a hand on his chest where it felt like his heart had stopped. He choked again, clearing some of the fog that had briefly overtaken his mind. Eventually, the boy leaned back his chair, gasping for fresh air. In his panic, he hadn’t realised he was still holding onto a limp rat.

It was later, after his panic subsided, that Kid realised the rat was dead and its soul was gone.

Chapter End Notes

RIP Unnamed rat. Best OC I’ve ever made.
Comments are appreciated.
Next day, as Kid was putting on his usual clothes, he noticed three white spots on his hair. They were barely thicker than a hair’s width, and were located on the side of his head. Kid grimaced and rearranged his hair so that the offending spots weren’t visible. The boy’s first thought was that the stress of hiding things was getting to him and that he should get more rest, but then he remembered what happened last night and all thoughts of relaxation went out of the window.

After last night, Kid had hidden all evidence of his experimenting; the rats were freed outside the castle, the dead rat was hastily thrown outside and he had hidden his notes in the usual spot on his bed. The only evidence of what had happened was Kid’s mind which was still processing the events.

At first he was scared that he had woken someone up. After some minutes passed and no one came to check up on him, a tiny part of Kid relaxed. Only he would know what happened.

Still… what had happened? He had killed that rat, he had torn apart the connection between body and soul. Kid knew that only severe physical damage done to a body could do that, either because of a confrontation or due to old age. The only way to actively break it was if you wanted to consume the soul, yet Kid knew he wasn’t a Kishin Egg –quite the opposite– so that left more questions unanswered. Maybe it was like Mother’s Wavelength? Maybe Kid’s particular niche was ripping souls apart?

That still didn’t explain why the rat had initially slept though. Maybe his Soul Wavelength’s effect depended on their ferocity? He had certainly used ‘more’ of it the second time.

The boy rubbed his eyes. Augh, this wasn’t making sense.

Still. He could think about that later tonight. Now it was Saturday morning and he had to follow his usual routine.

With that in mind, he finished putting his clothes on. It was casual wear, a black shirt and black dress pants.

The boy made his way into the dining hall, where Mother and a few important members of Arachnophobia seated each day to take their meals. Mother was there, but almost everyone else was absent, due to how early it was. Kid sat on her left side as always. Her right side was reserved for
Giriko -Mosquito was on serving duty and would later sit next to Kid. It signified that Kid was important to the Witch, but also that he wasn’t the one she referred to in official Arachnophobia matters. He was fourteen after all.

“Good morning child,” the Witch greeted him, looking up from her tea. Mother preferred to have tea on most calm mornings. Her having tea means that there was little to worry about. It was when she was having coffee, especially the Greek type, that one knew the situations were grave.

“Good morning Mother.”

“Have you had a good night’s sleep? You look tired.”

Damn. Why did she have to be so observant? “Nightmares,” Kid replied. “It wasn’t anything serious though.”

“That’s good to hear.” It was a believable excuse. Nightmares weren’t an uncommon phenomenon here.

Their conversation was cut short by an Arachnophobia member, short in stature and covered head to toe by the standard issue uniform, barged into the Dining Hall. “Lady Arachne!”

The Witch in question frowned at the robed woman. Their limited off time was precious and should only be interrupted for serious matters.

“Last night-!”

Kid’s frame tensed.

“We got an intruder! They won’t tell us where they’re from, but they’re a Weapon-Meister pair!”

“The Academy,” the Witch hissed. “How did they get here in the first place?! My spiders would have sensed them!”

“We do not know Milady! All that we have is that we caught them while patrolling! They were ill-equipped to fight so we quickly subdued them for interrogation!”

“Not equipped to fight?” the Witch repeated. “If they were not here to fight then what was their purpose?”

“We do not know milady.”

“Did ya know why they were here though?” Giriko asked. “People can’t just stumble into this place.”

The woman shook his head. “We have confiscated their belongings but can’t make heads or tails of their purpose.”

The Witch sighed. “Very well. It appears I have to cut breakfast short.” She motioned to the blonde man. “Giriko, come with me.”

“Alright! We doin’ some old-fashioned interrogating?!”

“Don’t be crass. Such methods will probably yield us false information. I’ve done enough research to know so,” the woman said as she led the way out of the Hall, Giriko in tow.

When Arachne left the dining table, Kid soon excused himself too. The excuse he gave to Mosquito
was that he wanted to work on his studies over the weekend. The man of course took the excuse hook, line and sinker and allowed the boy to retreat to his quarters.

There Kid locked the door behind him. He didn’t want to be interrupted. Taking his secret notebook out of its hiding place, he began thinking back on the night before.

Truth be told, the qualities of his wavelength were only a small part of the puzzle. There were more things he wanted to explore.

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The prisoners were a man and a woman. They were both well-built, with dark brown dreadlocked hair and dark skin. The man was the bulkier of the two, dressed in casual sportswear. The woman had bandages covering the upper half of her body and one eye, with a loose camo pants.

“Sid,” the captured woman nudged at the man who looked up to see Arachne.

“The Witch herself came. I feel honored.”

“It’s not any day that someone comes unprepared into my base.”

“Touché. Don’t really have a retort for that and I’m not the kind of man who won’t admit to his mistakes.”

“Lady Arachne,” an Arachnophobia member motioned her from the edge of the cell. “They were caught at 2 in the morning, but we think they infiltrated us at midnight. We did not notify you earlier as we wished to confirm they weren’t a…”

“A hallucination influenced by the Madness,” the Witch completed her minion’s line of thought. “Very well. You mentioned their belongings were unusual. Where are they kept?”

“This way milady,” the minion addressed her and headed further away from the cell into a small room built in the stone. “We have put all we have found on the table.”

The woman took the duffel bag and emptied it on the table. A few objects fell down. Most were survival gear; a torch, water bottles, rations and a few iodine tablets to purify water. The unusual objects were a container filled with a strange black substance and a peculiar wooden tube. The latter object smelled strongly of incense.

She recognized the smell. It was used for a location spell, one aimed to pinpoint an individual’s locations. Did that mean they were searching for someone?

Arachne inspected the small tube. One way to determine who the spell was trying to locate was by seeing what name was written inside the tube. To do so however, one would have to break the cylinder, thus the spell.

It was hardly a dilemma. Arachnophobia was well-stocked when it came to Witchcraft ingredients, so she could easily recreate the spell if need be. Arachne liked to experiment, after all.

The Witch dug her fingers into the point where the main body and the cap of the tube connected. She forced it open using her long fingernails and emptied its contents on the table. Rosemary, sugar and a few seeds of wheat fell out. That was strange. They had used the same basic spices but different complementary ingredients. Such things were used when you wanted to increase the spell’s attributes, such as sensitivity. Problem was, this variation could only be used for certain distinct individuals, for example, a powerful Witch like her. This ruled out a major portion of Arachnophobia
-since if the Academy pair had ended up in her doorstep meant that it was looking for someone in her base.

Oh well. She would find out soon enough when she saw the name written inside the tube.

Placing the tube in her grip, she tightened it and crushed the pipe underneath. Opening her palm, she let the tube’s content fall to the table. Sorting them out, she picked a large fragment with writing on it. The ink was black and had settled deep into the wood.

The Witch’s eyes widened at the name on the plate.

*Death.*

Arachne took a step backwards, accidentally letting the piece fall from her hand.

It… it must have been some kind of mistake! The Academy pair must have been lead here by accident. It was impossible that Death was in Arachnophobia, much less anywhere else on this Earth-!

But if they truly were lead here… was it possible the spell had been badly made? That it was a fluke? The spell could have very well pointed them out in a person that had been involved with Death, the person that knew most and could guide the to it.

Even then though, if the individual the tracing spell was homing on had passed away, then it would point to where the remains were. In that case, the two humans should have been lead to Nevada, not here of all places.

“Lady Arachne?” the Arachnophobia members asked worriedly.

“Give me a moment,” the Witch shot back. “Go to the cell. Make sure our prisoners do not escape.”

Arachne fell back on her couch and rubbed her temples. She was in her private quarters, mulling over the events with a glass of aged red wine.

Her interrogation was all for naught. The prisoners seemed as lost as she was on why they were headed in Arachnophobia. The Witch thought that maybe it was a ruse, to cause her to doubt her own members. However, even with her strongest spells and truth serums, she got the same answer.

“The spell pointed us in your way.”

As for how they got here, they managed to weave in a simple pathfinding spell allowing them to teleport at close range towards the individual they were tracking. That had explained how they got inside her base, though it raised the questions of how they had acquired such knowledge about the spells in the first place.

Arachne had to do something about it. She had to investigate. Such rumors would only eat away at her waking moments. If Death had infiltrated her organization, there was much more at stake besides her own life. There was the matter of everyone else’s souls, Giriko’s, Mosquito’s, her child’s.

No, the Witch should make her own tracking spells and confirm her suspicions. She had already faced Death once, when they were in full power; she had the strength to do so again.

There was a knock on her door. The Witch stood up straighter. She wasn’t expecting anyone.
“Come in.”

The door opened, revealing a black-haired boy looking up at her. It was her child. Right, of course. She should compose herself.

“Mother, are you-?”

“Everything is fine. Just a minor inconvenience,” she reassured the boy. “Now, is there something you want to talk to me about?”

“Well, yes,” the boy said. “They haven’t been mentioned in any of my lessons thus far, but I’m curious and wondering if you could give me an introductory lesson on them...” he rambled off.

“On what?”

“Magic Circles.”

Arachne raised an eyebrow. “That’s a difficult subject. It requires not only knowledge, but a steady hand and creative thinking.”

“Yes, well...” Kid trailed off.

“Child,” Arachne said in an unamused tone. This was no time for secrets.

“...I may have borrowed a book about them and started practicing...”

The Witch sighed in relief. And there she was thinking Kid had done something reckless. “Oh.”

“I didn’t do anything wrong, did I?”

“No. I’m impressed. Have you done any practice?”

“A few things.”

The boy took out a notebook and opened it to the first few pages. Inside were perfect circles and squares.

Arachne smiled. “The shapes are very well made.”

“Yes, I didn’t find it very difficult. After all, you have to make sure they’re symmetrical-”

“Kid,” The mother immediately said when she said that particular word. She found that a gentle warning was more than enough to curb his child’s unusually obsessive nature when that word was concerned.

“Um right. I meant to say that I find it easy to construct the shapes...”

Arachne thought about this. On one hand she wanted nothing more than to spring to her lab and create a tracking spell on her own. On the other hand, she had duties and responsibilities as a mother and a caretaker, and her services were requested for.

Oh, well. It couldn’t hurt if it only took a few hours.

The Witch smiled. “Very well. I can only give you a brief crash course. After that you will have to study on your own. Make sure you don’t attempt to do a fully-fledged spell.”
The boy nodded. “Yes, Mother.”

Chapter End Notes

Comments are appreciated.
After Kid had left, which was when the moon had settled in the sky, Arachne escorted the boy to his quarters and then headed straight for her lab. There was no time to waste.

The Witch toiled all evening, mulling over already established formulas for tracking spells and coming up with a few interesting combinations of her own. In the end she had settled for making several tubes, each with a different method used to create them. The first batch were focused on accuracy, the second one had greater sensitivity, and the third one was made with specificity in mind. Arachne also made a few spare copies of each in case she needed a replacement tube for whatever reason.

The sensitivity ones were supposed to show if there were any signs at all of the Grim Reaper. It couldn’t pinpoint the location but was useful as evidence that Death’s Wavelength was there. The specificity ones were made to locate only Death’s Wavelength. Arachne had meddled with more than one powerful deities in her time, and she wanted to eliminate the possibility that it was a being other than Death stalking her. It wouldn’t be good news, but of her opponents, Death was the last one she wanted to face again. As for the accuracy tubes, they were self-explanatory. They would point out to where exactly the Grim Reaper’s location was, if they could detect any. The only problem was that in order to get accuracy you had to sacrifice sensitivity and specificity and vice versa.

It was nearly dawn when Arachne had finished her work. Rubbing some sweat off her brow, the Witch had set one water bowl for each tube. It was how the spell worked; like compasses of old, one placed the tube inside a tub or bowl of water and used the direction it pointed at as an indicator. For the tube, it was the sharp end, the one opposite to the cap, that showed the location of the tracked individual.

Taking a deep breath, Arachne deposited each tube in the bowls.

They all pointed in different directions. The sensitivity one was rotating all over the place; that meant that it did detect something. There was a powerful wavelength at her base, but it very well be a fluke and point to someone like Mosquito, or even Giriko. She had to confirm if that Wavelength was of Death.

Arachne looked over at the specificity one, which was rotating in a similar manner to her sensitivity tube. The Witch frowned, as it confirmed the suspicions that it was Death’s Wavelength they sensed and the spells weren’t being interfered by another powerful presence.

She looked over at the accuracy one. It stayed still, floating aimlessly on the water.
The Witch sighed; so far only her fears had been confirmed and she couldn’t do anything about it than theorize.

The only conclusion Arachne could reach was that Death’s presence was dispersed, or severely weakened. That was a positive, but it was still worrying that it had gathered up at her base. Was it her connection with the dead God or was something more sinister at play?

Maybe… she had a theory, but it was rather absurd.

Witches could hide their presence using Soul Protect. The technique masks their Soul’s appearance and its Wavelength. For example, if one was to use a locator spell on Arachne while she was using Soul Protect, they would be guided to her general region, but then the spell would fail to give her exact position. Was this what was happening?

Still, it didn’t make sense for Death to use Soul Protect. She didn’t even know if the Grim Reaper could use such a technique, since their soul was where all their power and existence depended on. When Witches used Soul Protect, it felt like an unnerving cloaking sensation, as if they were underwater but could breathe, but for Death that would feel like strangulation.

But… shouldn’t that worry her? Had Death returned and found a way to evade such techniques?

No, it couldn’t be. People’s souls still lingered to the realm. She had found that out when the Meister had been executed -despite their disobedience, Arachne hated killing any of her Children, so the female Weapon had been spared for now. The Meister’s soul lingered and was put away for further use. Point was, it lingered. If Death truly was in her base, she should have seen the soul fade away as was the case many years ago.

Was… was she getting paranoid? Was Asura’s madness really getting to her?

There was a knock on her door.

“Hello-?”

The door was opening. The accuracy tube sprung to life and pointed towards its direction.

The lights in the room flickered as Arachne summoned her magic. The door was flung open and the intruder was grabbed by the arm, taken in the room and lifted up in the air. Simultaneously, Arachne’s soul pulsed, ready for an attack that would incapacitate an elephant-

“Mom!”

The Witch immediately subdued her attack. She recognized the voice.

It was Kid. The boy was held by the arm, looking wide-eyed between it and the woman.

“Did- Did I interrupt anything important?”

But for a moment, that tube…

Arachne looked down at the bowls. The accused tube was now pointing floating aimlessly.

“Mom-Mother?” Kid asked. “Are you feeling alright?”

No, it must have been nothing. A fluke. Location spells were known for that, much less one aimed for accuracy. She should calm down; she was scaring her child.
Besides, it couldn’t be Kid. She had raised the child for fifteen years and he had never manifested any hostile tendencies against her. It wouldn’t make sense for Kid to be Death; such things were only fuel for her nightmares.

Honestly, a much simpler explanation would be that Kid, similar to Arachne, had an indirect association with the Grim Reaper. The Witch had found the child alone and half-dead among the debris of the battle between the two Gods. Being on the epicenter of that battle must have affected something, even if it was such a strange thing as an association with the Grim Reaper’s presence.

“Mother?” Kid asked again upon receiving no response.

She gently put the child down. Kid took a step back but didn’t leave the room.

“You didn’t show up for breakfast.” The boy looked around the lab and then at her. “We were getting worried.”

Drat. Was it morning already? She could have sworn she had at least a few more hours to work with. In any case, she should apologize.

“I’m sorry. You caught me in a bad mood.”

The boy nodded in acceptance. “Um, are you coming for breakfast?”

“No. Can you please tell Mosquito to bring me some coffee? Greek, bitter, no foam. He knows the rest.”

“Oh,” Kid said. When Mother wanted coffee, something was afoot. “Ok...”

“And Kid…” Arachne said as her boy was turning to leave. “I’m sorry for before.”

“It’s ok.”

“I didn’t hurt you, did I?”

“No, I’m fine. You just scared me for a second,” the boy said dismissively. “Is everything ok? Can I help you with something?”

“No, it’s alright.” The Witch gave the child a reassuring smile. “Mother will take care of it.”

As Kid left the room, Arachnophobia’s smile turned into a frown. If Death’s presence lingered in Arachnophobia… she would have to speed up her magic training. Unorthodox as it was, if Arachne completed it she could rival the Kishin’s strength and Wavelength, and eventually make her move. There was no time to waste.

A week later, Arachnophobia was attacked.

Chapter End Notes

Comments are appreciated.
The attack was brutal and unexpected. Arachne had sensed a few people on her sensor webs, but they were too few and she had severely underestimated her opponent’s strength.

This must have been what Medusa had warned her about. The Academy’s move.

Damn it all to hell. Her forces were sluggish and unprepared. Her stronger units were out on expeditions trying to stop this very thing from happening, so Arachnophobia was stripped of a major source of its manpower. Was this the Academy’s plan all along?

Or maybe Medusa had given her false information? Did her sister want her dead this much that she would risk the power vacuum left if Arachnophobia collapsed?

Even worse, the protective spells she had weaved around Baba Yaga Castle were torn apart by an unknown force. Arachne first though that the Witch’s Council allied with the Academy, but there were no traces of Witches in the Academy’s attack force...

Damn it all again. She could see through her spiders that her Samurai unit, at least the ones that were in her base, were holding out a part of the Academy’s forces at the sides. The entrance was breached, but a few Witches had held off the bulk of their forces. Still, she knew there were several groups that had infiltrated Baba Yaga Castle, and were heading towards her room.

“Shit, what the fuck happened?” Giriko yelled as he ran into her room. The man had just made it back with his unit, adding a few Witches and Samurais to their ranks. That would buy them some time, but would not be enough to turn the tables.

“We are being attacked,” Arachne calmly said. “I have taken care of most things that must be defended.”

There was one more concern she had. “Giriko, Mosquito, find Kid. Make sure you get him in a safe place, where he can’t be captured. Get him out of the Castle if need be.”

“But, my Lady, that would leave you-”

“Did I stutter, Mosquito?” the Witch hissed at the man.

“N-No, milady. It will be as you say.”

The men hurried out, leaving her alone. The Castle was rocked by another tremor, and Arachne scowled in annoyance. The Witch didn’t despair though. She had one last ace up her sleeve she could use.
Let them come. Her magic training was complete. It was only matter of using it, of making that final move and unleashing her madness upon the world.

Arachne Gorgon would make them beg for their Fallen God to claim their souls.

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Mosquito grimaced as another explosion rocked the castle. He, Giriko and Kid were in one of its many hallways. The two men had been running in panic trying to locate Arachne’s child when the boy had showed up in one of its hallways. Kid had a wide-eyed look and his clothes were a bit ruffled, but otherwise unharmed. The boy had tried to explain that he located the two men using Soul Perception and also ask if his mother was safe but Giriko grabbed him by the waist and lifted him up, ignoring all protests.

“I have to help milady!” the manservant despaired as they made their way through the castle, the sounds of battle erupting all around them. “Another blast like that and part of the castle may collapse!”

“Are you deaf, old man!” Giriko yelled as he led the way along the hallway. “Boss told us to watch over the squirt, she’ll be fine!”

“I can take care of myself,” Kid spoke up but was shut down by the blonde.

“Oi, Kid, I respect yer attitude, but nah, ya can’t. The Academy fights kids like ya for breakfast.” He adjusted his hold on the boy which went with much protest. “And stop wiggling, would ya? You’re not as light as you were when you were a littler squirt.”

“Yes, and you being seen as Lady Arachne’s child would make you even more of a target,” Mosquito agreed. The old man looked disapprovingly at the cattle-like hold the Weapon had on the child but did not comment. It was effective at getting them out of danger and the manservant was not averse to taking less dignified actions if it meant the safety of his masters. If keeping Lady Arachne and her son safe would be ensured by the vampire dressing in a bright pink tutu and doing the samba, he would do so without hesitation.

Kid cursed. Plan A of getting Giriko and Mosquito off his back didn’t work. It wasn’t as if he didn’t want the protection but there was one thing he had to take with him. His notes… he couldn’t let his research be engulfed by the conflict.

“I need to go to my room,” the boy admitted.

“Are ya nuts?! I just told ya, we gotta get out of here-“

“There’s something I need to take with me!” Kid shot back. “It’s important!” He renewed his efforts of being put down by the Weapon. “Besides, my room is on the way, it’ll barely take a second!”

Giriko growled as he sped up, turning on another hallway. “Ok, fine, but that’s on your head.”

“Splendid. Now put me down.”

“Nope. Arachne’s orders.”

Kid mentally cursed the entire way.

Eventually, the trio made it out of the room. Mosquito stood back as a guard while Giriko put Kid down. The child would like nothing more but take a good look at the mirror and fix his rugged
appearance. However, a quick impatient glare from the blonde urged him to reach on the hiding space behind his desk and grab the aged thick notebook.

Giriko groaned in exasperation. “Of course it’s a fucking notebook you fucking nerd, for a moment I thought you’d be like a normal kid and have a porn stash of something-”

Another explosion rocked the building. On the distance they could hear the sounds of battle, many of the screams belonged to Arachnophobia members.

“We have to move!” came Mosquito’s desperate voice. The manservant looked back to see Giriko drag Kid along by the shoulder. The teen was cooperating for once.

“Oh, we got it, now let’s scram -augh!”

A purple-red Wavelength echoed across the hall. Giriko stumbled back and fell to the floor, Mosquito having done the same. Kid found himself also taking a step back and clutching his notebook harder. The air became heavy, and it felt like the world was about to split apart. Red filled his vision and for a moment it felt like there was something crawling into his skin. At the same time, he felt a pressure build inside his head, accompanied by a cacophony of sounds and screams.

The boy found himself short of breath. That Wavelength… it was his Mother’s, but wrong.

Hell had just broken loose.

Amidst the chaos, Kid found himself stumbling onto a wall for support. The tainted Wavelength made it hard to breathe and Kid’s vision was blurring, not to mention that haze that obscured his thoughts. His legs and feet felt numb though his soul pulsed with… something, but Kid’s own self blocked it-

A scream caused Kid to focus next to him, where Giriko and Mosquito had bigger issues than intrusive thoughts. The duo was faring much worse, practically foaming at the mouths as their eyes turned backwards revealing white sclera. They were convulsing on the floor, limbs tossed in a mad dance to the corrupted Wavelength’s tune.

Maybe…

Kid reached inside him and grabbed onto Giriko’s and Mosquito’s flailing arms. The teen wasn’t sure why he found it easier to summon his Wavelength this time. It felt like the sheer power Mother’s mad Wavelength had torn off something but the boy was too freaked out to care.

The two men jumped the moment Kid’s hand touched theirs and then fell to the floor unconscious. A quick scan revealed that their souls were still attached to their bodies so they weren’t gone.

Still there wasn’t any time to lose. Kid hauled the two men with him, placing Mosquito on his back while he settled for dragging Giriko by the feet, and made his way further in the castle.

The Madness only became thicker as he moved inwards, and the atmosphere became heavy, like high humidity during a heatwave. Kid had great difficulty breathing, and was scared that his soul would eventually succumb into the Madness too.

No. No, he wouldn’t. He would remain sane and stop Mother from tearing her soul apart.

Kid racked his brains, initially lost at what to do and the Madness twisting his thoughts into nonsense. Eventually he found himself with a rough and risky plan, but it was all he had and Kid was very, very desperate.
The boy didn’t dare use his Soul Perception, for fear of seeing only red, as he could practically feel the Madness smothering him. It was a good thing he grew up on this castle and knew its layout like the back of his hand. He knew there was a room on his left with exactly what he needed. It was big and with little furniture. His mother used it as a specialized lab and study space for Magic Circles.

The boy practically slammed himself into the room, grace and subtlety be damned, expecting to see an empty room filled with old books and odd Witchcraft ingredients.

What he didn’t expect was to run across a group of people from the DWMA.

There were a group of four, two adults and two teens around Kid’s age. The teens had all huddled around a blonde woman who had an unconscious labcoat-wearing man on her lap. She was wearing an eyepatch with a lightning insignia and was on her knees, supporting a grey haired man with a screw sticking out of his head, who looked dazedly as the scenery. As for the two teens, the girl who had pigtails looked worriedly at her two elders, the albino boy doing the same only with much more nervousness when Kid barged in.

Arachne’s child momentarily froze before raising his one free hand and shouting, “I’m not going to attack you, I need help!”

Maybe it was the panic in his voice or the two unconscious people he was carrying, for the woman placed a reassuring arm on the girl’s shoulders. The two teens dropped their hostile stance but still had their guard up.

Kid, not really caring that much up to this point, dropped the two henchmen unceremoniously on the floor, close to the walls. He also put the notepad with his notes open at the page with a particularly intricate design. He went to the desk, picked a particularly heavy tome, opened it at a certain page. He took a pen as well, ripped two blank pages from the pad and placed them between his own notes and the book, and began scribing like a madman. Time to pull his disjointed plan into motion.

“What are you doing?” the girl from group asked.

“Hopefully stopping us all from losing our minds.” The boy gritted his teeth and cursed inwardly. “What was mother thinking?” he hissed to himself.

“Hey, ain’t you Arachnophobia?!” the albino noted when he noticed the details of Kid’s clothes. “That means you gotta be working along-“

“Ah yes, I’m fucking ecstatic at what’s going on, isn’t it obvious?” Kid drawled with poison in his voice. He didn’t bother looking back but continued his frantic scribbling.

“Soul, please,” the woman called at the boy who backed down but still eyed Kid with distrust.

“What are you trying to do?”

“Something that will hopefully stop Mother from being consumed by her Madness,” Kid replied, not taking his eyes off his drawing.

“Mother?” the woman repeated, clutching the near-unconscious man closer to her. “So you are Arachne’s child?”

“They both got the same creepy vibe.”

“Soul!” the blonde girl poked the boy at his ribs. “That’s rude!”

“Yes, and is he alright?” Kid answered, changing the topic to the grey-haired man in the lab coat.
The woman frowned at the mention of the man in her lap. “Stein is sensitive to Madness. He knocked himself unconscious so he wouldn’t hurt any of us.”

“Sure,” Kid distractedly answered as he kept drawing on the two pages. Concentric circles were superimposed over two squares who were arranged to form an eight-pointed star. The basic skeleton was similar to the shape in Arachne’s book, but the details, the writing among the gaps were lifted from Kid’s notes. “And I suppose when he wakes up we’ll have to knock him out again.”

“That’s what I’m trying to prevent.”

Kid looked back in confusion. “How will you-“

He paused when he felt it. Her soul emitted a certain type of wavelength, one that contrasted his mother’s current one. It was gentle and soothing, and Kid found it easier to breathe.

“…Oh.”

“You used Soul Perception,” the girl said accusingly.

“Yes, I did.” Kid was dying to ask about the woman’s unique wavelength, but he had to make sure he wouldn’t lose focus. He shook his head and focused back on his drawing.

“Wait, we know Miss Marie’s got the anti-demon wavelength, but what about you?” the blonde girl asked. “How did you make it all the way through here?”

“Life is full of surprises,” Kid cryptically answered.

“Those two?”

“Same as yours, only that I had to knock them out.”

“Are they Arachne’s right hand men?”

“Yes,” Kid snapped at the girl. “Now do you want to waste more time asking questions or will you let me work?”

“What the hell are you even going?” the boy asked.

“I’ve told you already, I’m working on stopping mother.”

“But you’re her kid, why are you working against her…?”

“No I’m not. I’m trying to stop her from doing something stupid.”

Their conversation was cut short as two men stirred from their slumber. The girl and the boy stood closer together, with the boy’s form adopting a slight glow. The woman held herself higher and shifted the man’s weight on one arm, freeing one of her hands.

Mosquito and Giriko barely had any time to process their surrounding when Kid spoke.

“If you two attack anyone and fuck this up, I swear I’m going to kill you myself,” Kid snapped at the two. “Play nice.”

Mosquito wasn’t sure if he should be more shocked at the expletive or the order he had just been given, but obeyed anyways. “Yes, young master.” He was also a bit too dazed to voice any objections.
“Where’d ya learn the word fuck?” was the first thing Giriko dazedly slurred.

“Take a look at the mirror,” Kid replied, causing the blonde man to look sheepish.

“You’ve been using such crude language in front of the young Master?!”

“Oi. Take a fucking break old man, it’s not like he wouldn’t learn that word from somewhere else-”

“This is no excuse-!”

“I need quiet!” Kid cut them both off.

“More like boss every day…” Giriko muttered to himself before speaking up. “Anything we can do to help?”

“Yes, I’m going to need a bowl, candles, a brush and a knife. They should all be somewhere inside this room.”

Judging by the multiple shuffling sounds behind Kid, the two teens had decided to help as well.

Mosquito frowned. “A knife?”

“I need it for the paint,” Kid answered back but refused to say any more.

The girl hesitated but a nod from the one-eyed woman get her to start searching the room along with Soul.

Giriko looked back and forth between Kid and the four unknown people. “Uh, I don’t think we’re supposed to be working with them.”

“We’re not working with them, they’re helping us in trying to stop Mother’s plan,” Kid shot back. “if you want to be consumed by the Madness, go right ahead and walk out of this room.”

Giriko looked for a moment like he would. However, his face scrunched up as he leaned against the wall. “Nah. I don’t like having my head screwed with, no offense to your buddy over there.”

“The sensation was… unpleasant,” Mosquito admitted. “Not something I would like to relive, though it pains me to go against milady’s wishes.”

“I got the things you need,” the girl said as she placed the piles of objects next to Kid.

“Good, just in time,” the boy said as he put his pen down and double-checked his design. It was unorthodox and he’d have to do a few adjustments to fit the size of the room, but it looked like it could work.

“Anything else we can do?” the girl asked.

“Yes actually. I need you to place the white candles on the four corners of the room and light them up, make sure they form a circle. Place the black candles in between the whites and leave a spare black one which I’ll place in the centre…” Kid instructed as he put the book and his notepad aside.

The two teens looked at each other before picking a handful of candles and putting them in their designated places.

Mosquito had joined in as well, taking the book and notes with care and placing them on top of the nearest desk. The manservant saw Kid move to the centre of the room, bringing the bowl and knife
with him.

The boy knelt at the centre, placing the bowl in front of him. He took a deep breath and removed his jacket, then rolled up the sleeves of his white shirt.

“Young Master?” came Mosquito’s voice as the man approached the boy.

Kid ignored him, extending his right hand over the bowl and clutching the knife with his left. The boy took another breath, exhaled and sliced across his forearm.

“Young Master!” Mosquito yelled, causing everyone to shift their attention to them. The servant tried to steer the knife away from Kid, and the boy wrestled against it.

“I need blood-” Kid said through gritted teeth.

“If it is blood you require, I would be more than welcome to provide it!”

“I have to use my blood. Now let me go.” The boy said and wrestled the knife away from Mosquito. “I don’t want to spill anything on the floor. And get me the brushes.”

The man was about to say something in protest but Kid’s glare caused him to go silent and go get the rest of the tools. As for Kid, the boy angled his hand so that the blood dripped down to his fingertips and into the bowl. Already a sizeable puddle was forming.

“You’re gonna pass out if you lose too much blood you know,” the albino boy said in concern.

“I’ll be fine,” Kid said dismissively. He paused and then quickly added: “But if I do faint, please paint the rest of the circle and put me in the middle.”

“The brushes, young Master,” Mosquito said distractedly as he deposited a handful of the items next to Kid. The manservant grimaced when he looked over to the blood-filled bowl.

“Thank you.”

Kid took the bowl with him and the thickest brush. Eyeing his design on the paper, he began working on the concentric circles.

The candlelight made his blood look darker than it actually was. The brush left thick strokes behind with some of the excess spreading into the cracks between the floor, forming thin net-like structures.

“That’s not a normal magic circle,” the blonde woman noted, watching their progress with her one good eye.

“I’m improvising,” Kid shot back.

The teen had just finished work on the two rectangles when he felt lightheaded and went weak at the knees. Mosquito and Giriko both went after Kid. Giriko held him up as he was the taller of the two Arachnophobia members.

“Dude,” the red-eyed boy said, “don’t pass out on us.”

“I may… require help,” Kid admitted.

“No shit,” Giriko said as he adjusted his hold on the child.

Kid pointed with his uninjured arm at the notes. “The paper… it has the circle I want to create. If you
could fill in the rest of the shapes, only the shapes, I can work on the writing…”

“Of course young master,” Mosquito said. “You should rest.” He placed the drawing on a clear surface and began distributing brushes to everyone.

“Yeah squirt, you’re the one bleeding out to make this happen.”

The pressure in Kid’s head only got more prominent. “I may require some assistance… getting up.”

“I got ya,” Giriko offered. “My drawing skills suck anyways.”

The girl looked hesitantly at the two lackeys. “I guess we’ll get started.”

“Use the medium thickness brushes,” Kid instructed her. “I’ll use the thin ones.”

“Ok. Hey uh, what happens if I mess up the design?” the albino boy said as he waved one of the brushes around.

“Then you’ll doom us all and I’ll make it my life’s goal to end you.”

“Oh.” The brush froze mid-wave. “I’ll be extra careful then.”

“Splendid.”

“What’s your name?” the young girl asked Kid.

“Ha!” Giriko roared in laughter. “Arachne insisted on giving him a proper name but the squirt only answers to Kid! How funny is that?!”

The kid in question growled in response.

The girl looked between the two. “Uh…”

“It’s Kid,” the boy responded. “Yours?”

“Maka.” She motioned to the boy kneeling on the side and working on the magic circle. “That’s Soul.”

“Uh, guys,” Soul said as he stood up. “We’re kinda running out of blood here…”

Kid nodded “The knife-”

“Young Master,” Mosquito objected.

“Don’t make walk over there and get it myself.”

Giriko sighed as he helped move Kid close to the bowl. “I’m repeating myself when I say you may not be big sis’s biological child, but you still got her stubbornness.”

“Poignant and hilarious as always, ugh,” Kid hissed as he had to cut the wound open, having already started to close. For a moment his world spun.

Giriko eyed the bowl. “That’s a lot of blood you’re using-“

“I know,” was the deadpan response he got.

A few more minutes passed at the two teens and vampire worked on the circle. Kid was clutching his
head as the pressure only built up, and was now accompanied by light-headedness. The feeling of numbness was back too.

“Circles are done,” Maka said with some hope.

“Same,” Soul added. Mosquito nodded in agreement.

“Good. It just needs some final touches-”

The door burst open and a few arachnophobia members walked in. Their appearance was in shambles, some of the masks having fallen off and revealing stretched faces, minds broken by the madness. Many more were outside.

“We’ll hold them off, you complete the circle!” Maka yelled as the boy adopted a bright glow and transformed into a wicked-looking scythe.

The next few seconds were chaotic.

Cursing everything, Kid pushed/crawled his way to the centre. Around him, he could feel the woman’s protective shield wavering. Mosquito and Giriko were gone, lost somewhere between the crowds. Kid’s sense of time became hazy as the Madness was growing stronger.

It was now or never.

Kid kneeled in the centre, over the black candle. He took a deep breath, closed his eyes and concentrated on his soul, on the wavelength he had used before to knock Mosquito and Giriko out.

The boy felt that spark come to life, dark energy cackling at his fingertips. The teen placed his hands down on the floor, the painted blood gathering it up and preparing to unleash it like a megaphone.

Kid gave the command and the magic circle was activated. A soul wavelength travelled its way across Baba Yaga rendering everyone who it passed through unconscious. Even in the main hall, the madness was punched away like a cloud of dust. The black form concentrated into a woman, who now stretched face down unconscious into the floor. At the same time, almost all of Baba Yaga’s protective measures had been triggered, causing stone doors to fall down and isolate different parts of the castle, crushing a few unfortunate individuals that lay unconscious below them.

As for Kid, the boy barely had time to register the fallen bodies around him, their chests still moving for they were merely sleeping, before darkness claimed him and he collapsed onto the floor.

Chapter End Notes

Comments are appreciated.
Outside Baba Yaga castle, on the outskirts of the dark forest surrounding the spider-like castle, was where the Academy had set up their mission Command Centre. It was made up of humble tents protecting the electronic equipment and the few occupants within it.

It was currently in a chaotic state, to say the least. All their lines with teams inside the castle had gone dead, leaving only an extra battalion of Meisters and the few teams fighting outside the castle. For a few excruciating moments they had all thought that Arachne had unleashed a devastating attack and wiped out all traces of the Academy within the castle walls. This assumption was soon put to rest as Arachnophobia’s group outside the castle also collapsed into chaos since they couldn’t communicate with their HQ.

Though both sides had taken a hit, the Academy still retained their command centre and a greater amount of forces, which soon suppressed any remaining Arachnophobia resistance. Just now they had begun clean-up. Their confusion wasn’t helped when they received reports of everyone inside the castle being unconscious but alive.

A tanned woman with long black hair approached another woman, this one dressed in a suit and with short black hair. “Azusa, just got another heads up. Almost all Meister-Weapon groups have been recovered. We’ve just began clean-up of Arachnophobia’s members as well.”

“Good I’ll radio back to HQ; we will need help carrying so many prisoners. Have they breached the main room as well?”

“Yes, a team just went in. Guess who they found unconscious just like everyone else.”

Azusa put a hand to her chin. “That Wavelength... it came from inside the castle.”

“So it was someone’s Wavelength that did this?”

“I assume so. The moment I felt it was when everyone fell silent.”

“Azusa,” she asked the Asian woman hesitantly. “was that Arachne’s madness?”

“No,” she replied. Azusa looked back towards the mountainous region, where Baba Yaga castle lay hidden.

“This was something else entirely.”

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Kid woke up in chains. Thick leather restraints wrapped around his frame, keeping his hands against his torso. It was tight like a corset, and he found it moderately hard to breathe. His feet were also held together with chains, too tight to let him take a proper step. Most annoying however, was the leather gag around his mouth stopping him from talking.

He was in a bare room. The walls were plain and weathered, the wood long eaten away by the years and revealing a stone foundation underneath. A bare lightbulb provided a faint orange light. The most modern things on the room where the two chairs and table, made of metal and bolted to the stone floor.

A man entered his room. He was tall and well-built, with shoulder-length blonde hair. He was dressed in a snazzy suit and a pair of round tinted glasses that hid his eyes from view. His gaze fell on Kid and the boy flinched. Something about his gaze reminded him of a hungry predator.

The man strutted to where Kid was. He knelt down so that he was at the boy’s eye level and reached behind Kid’s head.

"I am going to remove the gag for now so you can talk.” His voice was smooth but dangerous. “However, don’t get your hopes up.” He whipped out a small knife and pressed it against the child’s throat. "Make any attempt to escape or use magic and you won’t be able to talk anymore.”

Kid did as told and kept his head very still. The gag was slowly being loosened, and he felt a few rough pulls every now and then, jerking his head back and making it press uncomfortably tight to the knife. Eventually Kid found himself free of a gag. He took a deep breath but kept his neck still, since the man’s knife was still pushed against his throat.

"Now that you can talk," the stranger said as he took the knife off his throat and seated himself on a chair on the other side of the table where Kid was, "let's introduce ourselves.” The stranger gave him an insincere smile as he pocketed the knife. Kid kept his gaze on the man and remained silent.

"I'm Arthur," the man continued in a light-hearted tone. "Who do I have the honour of talking to?"

Kid didn’t answer as he focused his gaze on the table, pointedly ignoring the man.

Arthur sighed and closed his eyes for a moment. When he opened them the downward slanted orbs had obtained a menacing air, and he slammed his hands against the metal table, causing Kid to flinch.

"That's rude. I asked you a question. Don’t you have manners, boy?”

Kid still didn’t reply.

The man sighed and stood up. Kid’s shoulders tensed as Arthur walked to him. However, even in his alert state there was little he could do but try and struggle as the adult grabbed hold of his chin and brought the knife to the boy’s lips.

“'If you’re not going to use your tongue, I might as well start from there.’”

"'Kid,' the teen swiftly replied. "My name is Kid." He hoped that by giving Arthur his nickname they wouldn’t be able to connect it with any records of him in Arachnophobia: Arachne insisted on using Kid’s given name, even though she had mostly resigned to calling the boy by the only name he responded to.

“Good. That’s progress,” the man cooed condescendingly, letting go of the boy's chin. “Hi, Kid. Nice to meet you.”
“Where am I?” Kid asked. Now that he couldn’t play the silent card anymore, he might as well try to gain as much info as possible.

“Look at that, so talkative all of a sudden.” The man’s sardonic smile never left his lips. “Where do you think you are?”

Kid frowned at the words as he tried to recall what had happened. He was pretty certain he had fainted after performing the ritual within the magic circle. He thought back on the events, on the way he touched the circle and felt a tearing sensation at his soul and the action caused him to cough. If he focused inwardly, Kid was acutely aware of the restricting barrier around him. It must have weakened but it still felt like his soul was wrapped and strangled in a plastic bag.

The boy saw Arthur scowl and reach out to him again. “Cat got your tongue again?”

“I don’t know,” Kid blurted out.

Arthur pouted. “Oh come on, it’s not that hard kiddo. Your folks were attacked by the Academy. You all fell unconscious and now you wake up in a strange room. It’s not such a hard riddle or anything.”

“…You’re from the Academy?” Kid said with a dawning horror. Then did that mean Mother-?

“Ding dong, correct!” Arthur’s grin widened when he saw the terror in the boy’s voice. “Ah come on, we’re supposed to be the good guys, aren’t we? The underdog destined to raise Death and bring back Order to the world~”

Fuck everything. Arachne was the reason Death had perished and Kid was her son. They couldn’t have been taken in by a worst group. Not only that, the unknown fate of his mother, Giriko and Mosquito ate away at his soul. Kid just wanted to stop mother from going stark raving mad, but now he may be responsible for her death.

…Was this it?

“See, there’s one more question I want to ask of you,” Arthur’s said, cutting the boy off from his mental freak out. “What’s your role in Arachnophobia?”

“I-I’m a simple member-” Kid began.

Without warning, Arthur rose and delivered a nose-breaking haymaker at the child’s face. Kid’s head reeled back from the impact, his vision blackened for a second, and he became acutely aware of the barrier suffocating his soul. When he came back to reality, he tasted blood and coughed up a few drops of it. Kid had accidentally bitten his tongue and the impact from Arthur’s punch tore his lip.

“Don’t lie to me kiddo. I don’t like it when people do,” the man said, all humour gone from his voice. “You were found with Arachne’s top lackeys. From what the other members of the Academy told me, you didn’t identify yourself at the time sans your… well I suppose ‘Kid’ could be a name.”

The boy frowned as he coughed up a few more drops of blood. He had admitted to the woman and teens there that he was Arachne’s child, so shouldn’t Arthur know that as well?

Unless they didn’t tell him? Why?

Arthur grimaced as the boy scowled at him, mouth bloody. “Ah crap, sorry about that. Got overexcited you see.” He sat back at his chair and cracked his knuckles. “I’m not supposed to beat you up over that yet. See, you are not the only one we got. Everyone on the facility was knocked
unconscious and that involved quite a few members as well, including you, boy. I’m sure one or two can shed a light at the mystery that is ‘Kid’.”

The man indicated behind him and he pushed his chair to face between Kid and the exit. “Let’s bring one here, shall we?”

Kid followed Arthur’s haze at the door. Using his Soul Perception, he detected a few souls coming their way. The centre one was purple, a witch’s soul, whereas the souls surrounding her were blue.

Eventually, a woman surrounded by many people dressed in military gear entered the room. The woman had similar bindings as Kid, sans the gag and the chains at her legs. Her hair was long pale blue, and her theme seemed to be frogs.

“Identify yourself.”

The one worrying thing about her were the numerous bruises and cuts seen on her skin not covered by her clothes. She had a nasty bruise on her cheek, and her palm were faintly covered in red, probably from wiping away blood. Also, her hair was wet, and the woman was taking deep breaths, as if she had just emerged from the deep sea.

It didn't take much to see the Witch was not here because of her own free will.

“E-Eruka Frog. Witch.”

“Nice to meet you, Eruka. I’m Arthur. I just want one little favour from you.” The man indicated towards the boy. “Tell me, who is this mysterious ‘Kid’?”

The Witch’s gaze fell behind Arthur to regard the child. Her eyes briefly went wide and she bit her lip, but brought her gaze back to the man. “T-That’s it? Easy…” She gulped. “He’s Arachne’s son.”

Arthur arched his eyebrows and looked back at a nervous Kid. As for the boy, he was torn between cursing at the Witch and trying his best to look as small as possible.

“Thanks.” His face turned dispassionate as he addressed the guards. “Dispose of her.”

Eruka’s eyes widened. “What?!” She protested as she struggled against her guards. “You said if I told you who this kid was you’d spare me!” she yelled as she was taken away.

Arthur nonchalantly shrugged. “I lied.”

Kid flinched when a scream followed by a gunshot echoed and the Witch’s soul adopted a greyish hue.

“So,” Arthur drawled ash he turned back on the child. “Look what we got here.”

There was a manic gleam in his eyes.

“Arachne’s child.”

Chapter End Notes

Comments are appreciated.
Kid could only stare at Arthur with mute horror. The man’s glee was palpable and the way he twirled the knife at his hands was all the more worrying.

“Arachnophobia’s best kept secret. Guess Arachne still has some sliver of humanity and wanted to keep you out of our reach.” The man let out a small chuckle. “I, for one, would have never guessed that woman was capable of caring for another human being, never mind being able of giving birth to one.”

Kid didn't respond. He was trying to think up of a way to deny his connection with Arachne, but he couldn't find a way that wouldn't make it blindingly obvious he was lying. From what little he'd experienced, it was best not to lie to Arthur. Not that it helped if the boy told him the truth either.

Kid was so screwed.

“Unless…” the man continued, tilting his head as he scanned the child from head to toe. “Well, take away the black hair and pale skin, which aren’t that uncommon, and you two don’t really look alike.”

Kid still kept his mouth shut. Denying the man’s accusations would only make him more suspicious.

“So, tell me boy,” Arthur sneered as he invaded the boy’s personal space again, “from what family did she steal you?”

“She didn't steal me,” Kid protested in indignation. It was no secret to the boy that he was adopted. Arachne had made no effort of hiding the truth but also made sure that Kid never felt unwanted. She had shared the story with how she had found Kid, being frank about the details but also mercifully hiding the goriness of the scenery she had found herself in.

Arachne had saved Kid’s life in a way.

“And how do you know that? Because she told you so?”

“Where exactly are you going with this?”

“Why, I’m just offering some healthy criticism! Is that such a bad thing?” The man put his hands on his hips in mock indignation. “But surely Kid, you know the tales. You did grow up with a Witch.”

Kid huffed. “I did, and whatever you are referring to are old wives’ tales.” If Arthur wanted to shake up Kid’s loyalty about his mother, he had really gone down the wrong route.
“So I suppose Weapons are just figments of the imagination? As are all of your Mother’s other accomplishments?”

Or not. Still, this was a separate issue Kid had with his mother and Arthur was just shooting in the dark so Kid shouldn’t ponder too much into this.

“Something tells me, and this is just a thought, that there are things Arachne has not been telling you. Things she is purposefully kept hidden from you.”

Kid mentally rolled his eyes. Of course mother hid things from him, he was fourteen. Kid was self-aware enough to know his limitations.

“See, I’m just trying to understand how an old hag like her, one who plunges regions into the Madness, destroying families, decided to adopt a stray out of the blue.”

“Who knows? I must have made an impression,” Kid shot back.

Arthur just smiled at the remark. “Ah, the lengths kids will go to keep their parents in a pedestal. But haven’t you ever thought about it Kid? That you dear mother had a reason for taking you in?”

Kid wanted to roll his eyes, he really did. However, he was acutely aware such an action may result with a knife on his throat.

…and maybe there was a small part of Kid that was terrified of some of his mother's actions and had harboured a small amount of fear towards her.

"Maybe she had other plans that needed a young healthy child...” Arthur paused. “Do you even know if she truly considers you her child?”

Goddammit, Arthur's blind pot-shots weren't as inaccurate as he'd liked.

Arthur traced the outline of Kid’s jaw with his knife. “Maybe I’ll bring you all together and she how much mommy values you compared to her secrets...” Once he reached the end of the boy’s jawline he angled it towards his throat.

No, the man was wrong. Kid was never abused. Arachne was strict but fair, and often complimented Kid in work well done. She respected Kid's boundaries and opinions. Though she did try to change his mind in some things, she had never forced Kid to do something he wouldn’t want. Arachne appreciated his free will.

Now, if he could just quell his paranoia, that'd be great. So what if mother may be holding things from him? Even if the information concerned Kid, she probably had a good reason and should stop listening to a man who probably wanted him drawn and quartered.

“Arthur, enough!” The door was thrown open only for a small group to enter. There were two women and one man. The boy recognised the blonde woman as the one at the room during the Academy’s assault which only amplified his dread.

This couldn't be good.

"Deathscythes!" Arthur chirped. "To what do I owe the honour?"

“We’ve been informed of recent developments,” the spectacled woman stated, her gaze focused on Kid. “We felt it would be best if we removed you from this situation.”
"Oh dear, are you here to be a party-pooper, Azusa?"

"We all agree with her," the red-haired guy said, standing next to Azusa. "We will take care of this," he added, throwing a glance at Kid.

"By whose orders, Spirit?"

"Ours," a new voiced announced as its owner walked into the room. This one was wearing a bear-head -Kid blinked to make sure he wasn’t hallucinating the last part. The teen guessed he was a man from the masculine frame and voice.

"Tezca," Arthur mumbled, sounding less amused by the second.

"Stand down, Arthur," the bear-head man said. "You don’t want to go against four Deathscythes, do you now?"

To emphasize Tezca's point, Spirit crossed his arms and gave Arthur a smug look.

"Fine, if you wanna be so stubborn about such a little thing..." Arthur gave one last smirked to Kid who failed to hide his flinch. The man looked away, temporarily amused, and walked up to the four adults. "You're gonna regret this you know."

Marie scowled while Spirit huffed. "Yeah, right."

"Go on the way you do and I don’t know how much the others here will let you hold on to your power. The people here thirst for blood. It’s human nature you know."

Arthur leaned in close, causing the other man to back away, his cool mask cracking.

"The people want death."

"You are ordered to leave this room now," Azusa emphasized, her austere gaze fixed on Arthur.

Arthur frowned for a brief second, but then he just gave the people one of his ironic smiles. "Very well, I shall play by the rules."

Arthur looked back on the child.

"See ya soon, kiddo." He nonchalantly waved at the boy before loudly closing the door behind him.

Kid anxiously looked to the new arrivals. He didn’t know whether to be relieved or terrified. For how little he knew of Arthur, Kid didn’t want to be alone with him in a room for long. On the other hand, these new people were unknowns, sans for Marie. Kid had semi-cooperated with her, more out of necessity. He had thought she was friendly, but with the tables turned like this, he had no idea what to expect.

"Creepy bastard," Spirit mumbled under his breath the moment Arthur left the room.

"Easy there, Spirit," Tezca began.

"I don't know why we keep him around."

"Arthur did get us the intel that helped us invade Baba Yaga," Marie admitted, letting out a small sigh.

"Yeah, by acting like a psychopath." Spirit crossed his arms in indignation. "We're supposed to be
better that that crazy Witch."

“Mother is perfectly sane,” Kid instinctively protested, before he could catch himself. This was his mother they were insulting.

"Right, we have you to worry about as well," Tezca said, placing a hand on his mask, where the forehead should be.

"What do we do with him?" Azusa asked. “He is a potential threat.”

Kid braced himself, as Marie gave the woman a scandalized glare. “Azusa, he’s a child!”

“Arachne’s child.”

Marie opened her mouth to respond but closed it shut shortly afterwards.

“His soul doesn't look like that other Witch’s child," Tezca eventually said.

Kid tensed at the reference of his cousin, Crona. The two had little contact with each other, since Medusa and Arachne did not get along. From what little Kid had seen however... He was glad Arachne was the one who'd found him that day.

“This isn’t reassuring," Spirit muttered.

“No matter what you’ll do to me, I'm not going to say anything," Kid preemptively said. "I won't betray mother."

“Woah, easy there, kid, we ain’t gonna hurt you.” Spirit put his arms on his hips. “What’s your name anyways?”

The boy growled in response.

“Ok fine, if you’re not gonna tell us, I’ll just call ya kid.”

The boy turned away. His name situation really was frustrating at times. Not frustrating enough that he could force himself to respond to another name but Kid, though.

“Look boy, we’re the good guys,” Spirit began.

The boy rolled his eyes. “Definitely. That's why I'm coughing up blood.”

“You’re underestimating how much certain people hate Arachne and would do anything to get back at her.” Tezca paused and for a moment, Kid found that ridiculous head covering intimidating. “Especially when the one person she considers her kin is within their reach.”

“I'm aware," the boy said, looking down at the small flecks of blood on his shirt.

“I’m afraid you aren’t. Arthur is just an example. Some of the people out there… they get to you and we lose any right to be called the good guys.”

“Then make sure they don’t,” Kid shot back, feeling a bit more indignant about his position now that he didn’t seem to be dealing with bloodthirsty lunatics.

“Not as easy as it sounds.” Marie sighed and the rest of the adults looked away, wary.

Kid’s eyes narrowed. “You’re the minority," he stated.
If by ‘us’, you mean people who wouldn't go as low as torturing a kid to get at his mom, then yes. We are a minority,” Tezca explained.

“…Crap.”

“Good, you’re getting what I’m talking about.”

Kid bitterly huffed. "I don’t have anything of value. Mother doesn't really share the intricacies of her plans with a fourteen-year-old.”

“Kid… do you mind if I call you Kid?” Marie spoke up and gave him a warm smile. She walked closer and sat on her knees, bringing herself to Kid's eye level. "You helped me at Baba Yaga. I want to pay back that help.”

“I wasn’t helping you,” Kid protested. "I was trying to get Mother to stop giving into the Madness.” The boy looked away. “If I’d known we would end up here, then I may have reconsidered my plans.”

"Cheeky brat," Spirit said, though his tone carried little hostility.

"Marie," Tezca said, letting out a heavy sigh. "We have to go. There's work to do."

The blonde woman stood up and gave Kid a final small sad smile as she exited the room, following Spirit and Azusa. "We'll come visit again."

"I'll get someone to bring you to your cell. And also get you some food," Spirit said a bit hurriedly as he left the room.

Kid spent the next few hours alone in the dark, trying to keep his imagination from running wild about what would happen from now on.

Chapter End Notes

Comments are appreciated.
Kid must have slept at one point, since there was a gap in his memories. He woke up when someone wrapped a cloth around his eyes, pulling his head back which only irritated his cramped neck. He was lifted from the chair, still bound, and pushed along throughout the building. Though his sight was restricted, he could still use his Soul Perception and other senses. The air was musty and cold, and the only sounds Kid could hear were the footsteps of the people surrounding him. Their souls were a large bright blue, human and powerful.

They traversed through quite a bit of ground, taking a few turns every now and then. Kid tried to keep track of where they turned but he soon grew irritated by the seemingly chaotic and unbalanced order, they were taking too many left turns and few right ones.

Eventually, they stopped and there was the sound of a large creaking door being opened. Kid was pushed inside then guided to sit in another chair. The boy couldn't protest, being already restrained, and he had to hold in an irritated sigh as he felt more thick leather binds being wrapped tightly around his frame.

When the blindfold was taken off, Kid found himself in a new room. To his surprise, he wasn’t alone. The room he was in had a massive tempered glass wall built into the stone. Around it were three other rooms, containing people Kid didn’t think he would see alive again. There was Arachne, Giriko and Mosquito, each one in their individual rooms with unique bindings. The three were already restrained and focused on the room Kid was in. Giriko settled at glaring at the people around Kid, whereas Mosquito simply narrowed his eyes. Arachne ignored them completely, focusing over her son and going over his frame, eventually giving a small sigh of relief at the lack of injuries. In the meantime, Kid managed to get a good look at them and how they were restrained.

Everyone’s bindings were different. Mosquito's restraints were rubbery, probably to account for a sudden increase in size. They had also encased his nose in a large polyester cube. It would be a funny sight if they weren't imprisoned by their enemies. Giriko only had thick chains on his neck and limbs. However, there was a thin layer of water at his feet. The man could probably slice his chains right off but maybe such an action would cause a current to flow through the man, electrocuting him to the point of unconsciousness, or worse. His mother's prison was different too. A thicker glass pane separated her from the others, and the exit to her room was bolted shut, leaving no cracks between the door and the floor. Kid thought it must have been to stop her from dissolving into her spiders and escaping through the cracks- Arachne's prison had to have miniscule ventilation.

Looking back on his own prison, Kid guessed they used all the basic methods of imprisoning on him since they weren’t aware of the extent of his capabilities. They limited his movement and speech, the latter as a precaution against the boy conjuring an unknown spell, which was redundant since Kid couldn’t do any actual magic.
Though there was his wavelength… but he’d have to force physical contact with someone, and that would still leave him bound.

The door behind Kid creaked again and the boy sensed a human soul behind him. He tried to crane his neck to no avail, though he did catch Arachne’s sober expression which looked over the boy’s shoulder.

"You may all be wondering why you are all still alive," a familiar voice came from behind Kid, causing a shiver down his spine.

It was Arthur.

Arachne scoffed in annoyance. Mosquito had his expression carefully blank whereas Giriko had leaned back and regarded the man with annoyance. Kid gulped but he didn’t let his nervousness show.

"Matter of the fact is, none of you will talk when you're alone. So I thought, why not bring you all together, break the ice and all that?" He let out a hollow laugh as he walked to Kid’s chair.

"You want to torture us one at a time in hopes someone eventually breaks," Arachne nonchalantly cut him off. "At least be straightforward with your intentions," she replied upon seeing the man's scowl.

Arthur sighed and put his hands up in defeat. "Ok, you got me. I'm not here to make friends," he replied in a cheerful voice.

He turned to his side where a table was. Simultaneously one person walked into each prisoner's cell, including Kid’s. The boy noticed the person in his room, a middle-aged woman, carried a double-handed axe.

"The other folks here are my friends though," Arthur said as he picked up a particularly sharp knife. "They'll make sure none of you misbehave too much."

Kid had the gag taken off by the woman in the room. The boy stood still, trying his best to lay low on these people's radars.

"Let’s get this started." Arthur snapped his fingers. "Ladies first."

The man who was in the room with Arachne took out a menacing hunting knife and placed it at the Witch’s throat, who only gave them a derisive laugh.

"I have to say, I thought the accounts of your beauty were exaggerated. I stand corrected," Arthur began, ignoring Mosquito’s nasally protests and Giriko’s muffled yells. Kid also wanted to protest, but a quick knowing glance from Arachne squashed any such plans. "Who knew behind such a lovely face is the soul of a cold-hearted monster?"

Arachne only smirked in response. "No matter what tortures you come up with, they will be dreams compared to what I will do to you," The woman craned her neck back to give a predatory smile to the man holding the knife. His hand trembled. "Do your worst."

"Uh uh uh, don’t rush me. You have to build up to these sorts of things."

Giriko, who was still muffled, let out a long string of what was possibly curses.

“So, I’m going to ask question to each one of you. If you fail to answer, you’ll get punished. If you
lie…” he indicated to the glass where Kid sensed another blue orb was. “We’ll know.”

“How can you know when someone is lying?” Mosquito loudly asked, his voice having lost any hint of elegance with his nose bound.

“We have ways. And people. You really shouldn’t underestimate humans.”

Arachne threw him a haughty scoff. “Stop dilly dallying and get to the point. What do you want?”

“What so many people want! Information! Specifically,” the man’s smirk now had a manic edge to it. “That Wavelength that knocked everyone out.”

Kid felt his blood ran cold.

Arachne’s expression briefly morphed into one of confusion. “What do you mean?”

“Don’t play dumb dear, it’s uncharacteristic of you.” Arthur leaned against the glass, waving his knife as he talked. “I wonder why you did it. Perhaps you were desperate for a trump card, so much so that you would risk the wrath of your old enemy?”

At this Kid frowned. Arthur’s words didn’t make sense.

Arachne seemed to follow a similar train of thought. “You’re not making things any simpler.”

“Don’t play daft, you old hag!” Arthur’s patience appeared to have run out. “That Wavelength that rendered everyone unconscious -we all felt it!” the man spat out. “What have you done to Death, Witch?”

The next few seconds were ones of seemingly eternal silence. Arachne’s expression stretched before being forced into a neutral but unnatural poker face. Meanwhile, Kid’s mind was reeling.

Arthur just claimed that the Wavelength used at the base was Death’s Wavelength. However, Kid knew that in actuality it was his own wavelength that he used in the magic circle. These two details were incorrigible with each other.

Was Kid missing something? Had he accidentally created a summoning circle? His was certain his was supposed to be a circle that amplified the user’s wavelength, not summon one!

Had Arthur gotten it wrong? Had Kid done something wrong?

A few more seconds passed. Arachne hadn’t said a single word.

Arthur, now clearly annoyed, made a swift motion with his hand. The man on the other side of the glass nodded, and the dagger was pressed hard at Arachne’s skin. A thin trail of blood came out.

The witch’s face remained bored. Mosquito had gone red with seething fury whereas Giriko had a scowl on his face. Kid tried best to hide his worry, since this was what these people counted on but couldn’t help frowning in concern.

Arachne rolled her eyes. "This is pathetic."

"Oh I’m just getting started. Now, to move to the lackeys.”

Arthur backed away from where he was, instead heading over to where the elderly manservant was held.
“Mosquito. Know anything about that Wavelength?”

Mosquito turned his nose up -quite literally- causing the Styrofoam block to swivel, almost hitting his guard in the face. "If you think a gentleman like me will ever betray Milady, then you are but a deluded youth like that thug over there!"

"Fuck off, you old fart," Giriko shot back.

"My point exactly," the vampire calmly replied.

Arthur’s face grimaced, before morphing into his usual smug expression as he turned to the younger man. “Giriko?”

"Ha! You think a bastard like you intimidates me?! I've torn smug brats like you to shreds more times than I can count-”

"At least use a better metric, my boy,” Mosquito interrupted him. “If one was to take your statement at face value you've killed less people than the fingers on one hand."

"I can count pretty high old fart, stop sabotaging my speeches!”

The two then continued squabbling seemingly ignoring everyone else in the room. Kid found it funny and maybe a bit impressive how their rivalry took precedence over their own self-preservation.

Arthur evidently did not if judging by his frowned expression. The woman and man present in the two lackey’s rooms gave Arthur a lost look and the man disregarded them with a wave of his hand.

“Well then, it seems you leave me with little choice…”

Arthur craned his neck to look at Kid and any amusement the boy had from before vanished.

Chapter End Notes

Comments are appreciated.
Nihil (3TEETH, Mircalla Remix)

Chapter Notes

Link to playlist: https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PL5NETqX6iwyDY07_D49mrGq7Z5YSSCdFS

Don't forget to listen to the songs!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Everyone’s expressions fell as Arthur made his way to Kid.

"So, we move on to the little kid. Arachne's only child..."

The teen gulped but kept his composure, even as he felt Arthur's hand dig painfully into his shoulder.

"If you’re expecting a witty quip, I’m afraid I don't have one in hand," Kid responded dryly. Even if he was in the mood for sarcasm, what the hell would he brag about? Mother, Mosquito and Giriko were successful in their own fields. Kid had barely entered puberty.

"You know, there was speculation about you. Some even doubted you existed."

Arthur leaned in closer.

"Then again, appearances are deceiving. Your mommy over there looks pretty good despite the rotten monster she is. I wonder if that’s the case with you as well...? After all, doesn’t the saying go, 'like mother, like son'?"

“In that case, your slimy appearance matches your soul, so congrats on making the cover match its contents,” Arachne spoke up, diverting the man’s gaze from Kid to the Witch. The Witch gave Arthur a condescending look, perching her neck as to give the illusion that she was looking down on the man.

A brief scowl made its way into the Arthur’s face before smoothing over into a pout. “Hush dear, you'll get your turn. I’m talking to the kid.”

The man turned to face the teen once again, twirling the knife in his hand. "So, boy… do you know anything about that Wavelength?"

Kid didn’t answer, even when Arthur pressed the knife had enough to draw a thin trail of blood.

“Oh I should mention; if any of you do give me a good answer, I’ll stop. You can help each other. However, if you lie… well, none of you will get out unharmed.”

Kid kept his face neutral. It was just a cut, it wasn’t dangerous. Arthur couldn’t kill them already.

Could he?

“So, what will it be Arachne? Care to help out your son like a good mommy?"
looked like one. It didn’t seem to calm Arachne down, but it eased some of the worry lines on her forehead.

“He is a child, Arthur.”

“I’m well aware. He’s your little boy,” the man said nonchalantly. “What good mom wouldn’t want to get her kid out of harm’s way?”

Arachne’s glower only intensified in severity. Arthur simply pressed the knife harder on the already existing wound, drawing more blood.

“Oh gee, that’s quite a cut I made!” He grabbed a tissue and a small bottle of ethanol from his jacket, dousing the cloth with the alcohol. “Well, we wouldn’t want it to get infected now, would we?”

With little warning, Arthur pressed the cloth onto the small wound. Kid gasped. It burned more than alcohol ever should. The smell was pungent and strong, and the burning sensation only intensified when Arthur pressed on the open wound with a cloth. Kid instinctively angled his neck away from the man, but Arthur just pressed harder.

"You wouldn’t want your boy to get an infection and die now, would you?"

"Kid..." Arachne's glare could have killed a man, or in Arthur's case, repeatedly skewer him before delivering the final blow.

"I’m fine," the boy repeated, making sure to suppress any winces or other signs of discomfort, until the cloth was taken off.

“You’re all tough nuts, ain’t you?” Arthur gave them all a smirk. “I think we are all going to have a wonderful time here.”

Kid gritted his teeth. This was insulting. He knew he was young but he was not helpless. Being dangled by Arthur like a supposed damsel in distress was humiliating.

He was Arachne’s child. His mother had faced supposed deities and took them out using her intellect, cunning and pure audacity. The same was expected of him.

"Mother was right," the boy growled.

"What was that, kiddo?"

Kid spit at Arthur's face. The man flinched away and Kid smiled in satisfaction. "You are pathetic."

Arthur backed away, looking momentarily surprised. Afterwards, half of him looked torn between laughing in shock and strangling the boy. Arachne also looked torn, the woman split between cheering and telling Kid off.

Giriko had no such dilemma, letting out a hysterical laugh. “You go Kid! Damn, that’s the brass I wanna see from ya!”

“Enough!” Arthur yelled in annoyance. On cue, the guards stepped forwards, firmly grasping their Weapons. Giriko quieted down but still gave their interrogator a shit-eating grin.

“So that’s how it’s gonna be. I thought one of you might have at least cracked but your all such sourpusses...” The man narrowed his eyes at the prisoners. “So let’s cut to the chase. If you’re not going to say anything, I might as well start getting rid of you. Keeping people’s bodies alive is
expensive you know…”

Arthur let out a fake long-suffering sigh. “Ah, who should I start with? Not you Arachne dear, you’re the main star of our show,” he rambled as he looked between the three. “Your lackeys hold valuable info too…” his gaze passed over Giriko, “though one of them may be too dumb to remember it.”

“Hey, fuck you-”

“So that leaves us…” Arthur continued, unaffected ignoring Giriko’s long rant of expletives. The man’s gaze settled onto the teen, giving the boy a small smirk. “Looks like you picked the short straw kiddo. Shouldn’t have let yourself be taken in by that old hag.”

Kid tried hard not to roll his eyes at Arthur’s theatrics. It was obvious who the man thought as the weak link of the group.

The man began making his way towards the child. “Say, do you want to be let in on a secret kid?”

Arthur kneeled next to Kid, so that he was at eye level with the child. “People still die.”

Kid let out a small yelp as a rough hand dug into his scalp and pulled back his hair painfully, as if he wanted to tear them off. Something metallic was on his neck again - probably the man’s knife.

“Oh yes, the flesh is weak but the soul remains. So, even after I’ve torn you to pieces, I’ll still have you pretty little soul to toy with-”

“You have truly lost your mind if you think you’re going to get any information this way,” Arachne spoke up, a small hint of urgency in her voice.

“In fact let me share another rumour with you…” Arthur continued, ignoring the Witch and speaking over her, still focused on Kid. “I’ve heard that even when your body crumbles you are still conscious because of your soul. So, you will feel every ounce of pain as your soul lingers on this deathless realm. Some people say that lingering causes immense pain, beyond human comprehension.”

Kid’s soul experienced an unexpected lurching feeling at the man’s words. They felt wrong. He barely kept himself from gasping for breath, as Arthur’s tight hold was accompanied by a resurfaced suffocating feeling from his soul.

“You will be screaming for eternity and I’ll be glad to add to these screams.”

Kid closed his eyes and pursed his lips. He had to keep himself together or he would play into Arthur’s hands. The man wanted him to break his composure.

Kid wouldn’t give him the satisfaction, pure stubbornness motivating him to keep his face semi-neutral, save for a small worried frown.

"How about it, kiddo? Mommy isn’t going to save you. Don’t you want to save yourself?"

Kid kept his mouth stubbornly shut.

After a few painful seconds the man scoffed and let go of Kid’s hair.

“You’ve trained him well, Arachne.”

\*~*\*~*~*~*~*~*~*\*/
Kid didn't know how much time had passed. Sometimes it felt like weeks had rushed by, other times it felt like it had just been a few excruciating and dread-filled hours.

Kid couldn't count on his meals to calculate time, since he barely got any. His stomach growled in protest but he thankfully his hunger was more like a small throb on his being. The same couldn’t be said for Giriko; the man kept moaning about how hungry he was.

They were still in the same strange complex of prisons. Arthur visited them frequently, still insisting on learning more about the mysterious Wavelength unleashed the night of their assault.

His mother had taken the brunt of the punishment for him, using an effective if not distressing tactic. Arthur's interrogations were unscripted and spontaneous. There was no order, no organisation. Sometimes Kid wondering if the man wanted info at all.

Due to the nature of Arthur’s interrogation, he was prone to be affected by how his prisoners reacted. Any time Arthur approached Kid or roughed him up even a slight bit, Arachne would speak up, creating a disturbance, and Arthur would switch his attention to her. During the last few sessions, Giriko and Mosquito had been clued in and attempted to copy Arachne's strategy, with various degrees of success.

Occasionally their gazes met and Arachne have her son a small reassuring nod. Kid wanted to smile back but he saw the dark circles on her eyes and he kept remembering Arthur's knife graze his skin.

At least, the Academy hadn’t made any progress in acquiring information. Arachne had kept her mouth shut, the same happening with Giriko and Mosquito. Kid didn’t know if it was because of conviction or because of lack of actual information. Only Giriko had once let it slip out that many of his memories of the events was gone, but it did little to help their position or ease Kid’s growing anxiety. He remembered perfectly what had occurred the night of the assault. He remembered how the building suddenly shook and a flurry of blue souls made their way into Baba Yaga castle. If he focused, he could still recall the smothering feeling of his mother’s mad Wavelength and his own frantic attempts of constructing a magic circle.

Kid wasn’t exactly sure what anyone’s rationale was during their actions at that messy attack, including his. Even if Kid knew his Wavelength had the unusual quality of putting people to sleep, he had come to conclusion that his plan could have easily torn his soul apart. The magic circle he created was supposed to amplify what was already there, but it came with the danger of putting extreme strain on someone’s mind and soul. The fact that he was still standing was a miracle.

Maybe he was remembering things incorrectly? Had he created something else, something that summoned ‘Death’s’ Wavelength Arthur kept going on about? It seemed absurd, but it was one of Kid’s more plausible explanations.

Whatever the case, one thing that remained constant was that the boy was responsible for them getting captured. Everyone falling unconscious had allowed the Academy’s reserve forces to come in and apprehend almost every single member on Arachnophobia that was on duty. Kid had no one else to blame about this but himself, and the guilt weighted on him. He wanted to tell his mother, but he couldn’t, especially when it came with the risk of being overheard by an Academy member.

…Kid would have to talk about it with his mother eventually. If anyone could figure out what had happened last night, it was her. Truth be told, even if their current situation was looking grim, Kid had utmost faith in the Witch. According to the stories she had told him of her ventures when Kid was younger, this didn’t even make it into the top ten in terms of risk.

They would be fine. They would make it out of this. Arthur may unnerve them, maybe get a good
hit, but mother would come up with a plan and they would all work together to escape safe and sound. Kid didn’t doubt that.

What he was hesitant of was the aftermath.

Chapter End Notes

Comments are appreciated.
Lunch was always a nice distraction from their current situation in the infrequent cases they had them.

The biggest and most cheerful occurrence was that Arthur and his lackeys were never present. Instead, they were replaced by a group of people Kid had met before, one that was less likely to start cutting throats left and right.

Mosquito’s cell was always the most entertaining. In this instance, Spirit, was slowly itching towards Mosquito, a plate of almost raw steak in his hands.

The manservant remained seemingly still. Spirit took one then two less hesitant steps forward. Without warning Mosquito snapped his head at the man, baring his fangs and the man let a yell akin to a cat thrown in water, almost dropping the food. The man quickly retreated to a corner of the cell, balancing the plate on his forearm so he could form a cross towards Arachne’s minion.

Meanwhile, Mosquito had dropped the guise and let out a hearty laugh.

“If you don’t stop that I’m not gonna give you any food!” A spooked Spirit stuttered, still forming a cross with his fingers.

“I would, my boy, but you are far too easy to scare.”

Meanwhile, Giriko was locked in a staring contest with Azusa. His face was twisting into the funniest and more disturbing grimaces, like a one-sided version of a try-not-to-laugh challenge. The stern woman was currently winning their game of resolve, since she had only narrowed her eyes harder with each shifting expression, whereas Giriko was running out of ammunition.

“Are you quite done yet?” Azusa said with an exasperated sigh.

“Nah, I’ve been practicing some new ones. Here, tell me if you find them amusing or not.”

A few seconds passed. Azusa’s stare could kill a man.

“Your frown deepened, I’m counting that as a success!” Giriko announced giving her a wide grin, much to the woman’s increasing annoyance.

Unlike everyone else, Arachne was alone in her cell. The Witch smirked to herself, a bit proud of how her reputation was so fearsome they wouldn’t let a none approach her for any reason. There was a small hatch on the door where a plate of food was pushed through, before the hatch shutting
off completely.

Arachne had one of the increasingly multiplying spiders in her room bring the late to her and assist her in feeding, since all her appendages were bound. Instead she settled for observing everyone else, occasionally smirking with some of their antics.

As for Kid, the person in charge of him was Marie. From what little Kid knew about her, Marie was probably one of the kindest members of the Academy and a gentle woman overall. She reminded Kid of his mother, only with less brains and considerably more brawn.

Currently, Marie was looking at the antics at Giriko's and Mosquito's cells, her expression somewhere between amusement and disapproval.

"They're not going to stop any time soon," Kid offered, causing the blonde to refocus her attention to him. Not that she wasn’t attentive to Kid in general. The boy had no complaint from her and the only thing he could recall as unusual was how she kept glancing at Kid’s bindings, and with each time she did that what little joy she had left her face.

"Are they always like that?" Marie politely asked, diverting her gaze away from Kid. Her smile had lost some of it earnestness, as expected.

"I think they're happy they can frustrate someone else other than each other," Kid said, trying to sound casual.

On a level, he genuinely liked Marie, despite the circumstances they had found themselves in. She seemed to be a decent warm-hearted person, one who didn’t wish to cause any more harm than what was necessary. On another level, manipulating Marie’s own good nature wouldn’t be hard considering her kind disposition and Kid's young age. They boy wasn’t above that, having being drilled with a survival instinct since he could remember himself. Kid didn’t mean Marie any harm, but he wasn’t going to let go of a chance to create an escape opportunity.

That having being said, if the Arachnophobia members did manage to break out and mother got full access to them and the rest of the Academy....

Kid hoped Marie would have enough good sense to flee.

"Sorry to keep you up by the way," Marie said in a friendly tone as she walked closer to Kid, holding a small deep plate with food. There was not a lot of it in the plate; from what Kid could see and smell it was a local variation of bean soup.

“Is this his lunch?” Arachne spoke up, attracting the duo’s attention.

“Hm?” Marie let out as she looked over to the Witch, her expression becoming more cautious. “Ah yes, this is it for today.”

Arachne scowled as she looked over the small plate. “There’s barely any food there.”

Marie sighed in agreement. "That’s what I told them as well. The portions are too small for a growing boy…”

The Witch narrowed her gaze at the woman, a gesture Kid recognized as one of confusion. Arachne didn’t know a thing about Marie, after all.

"Which is why I made this!" Marie said with renewed cheer as she took out a plastic container with meat, cabbage, black peppers and boiled potatoes in it. “Fårikål! It’s a family recipe, very healthy-”
"Kid, don’t eat that," Arachne said in urgency, cutting off Marie who gave her a confused look.

“Eh-?”

"I don’t know what game you’re playing," Arachne continued in a low, dangerous tone, “but if you try to harm my child in any way, I will strip your soul bare and torture it for eternity."

"What are you talking about-?"

"Poison?" Kid asked in surprise, more in tune with the Witch's line of thinking.

Marie turned to the boy, her confusion not having subsided one bit. "What-?"

"Yes," Arachne replied, ignoring the woman's protests. “Just because they act friendly doesn’t mean you should let your guard down.”

Meanwhile, the other two cells had quieted down a bit. Mosquito had stopped his attempts to scare Spirit and instead focused on the Witch, with Giriko doing the same.

"This food is perfectly healthy- I will take the first bite if this makes you feel any better!" Marie exclaimed with utmost sincerity.

"Marie,” Azusa spoke up, “is everything right?”

“She thinks I’m trying to poison the boy!” Marie said with a scandalized expression.

“Oh please,” Arachne said dismissively. “I know the hatred you carry of me. A few empty words won’t change it.”

Marie sputtered a few words in shocked indignation while the other Academy members looked at the two in confusion.

“Ah, the depths the Academy has sunk,” Arachne continued, letting out a haughty laugh. “And you have the gall to call yourselves the good guys.”

Kid frowned as he looked back and forth between the incredulous Marie and the Witch. It didn’t make sense for his mother to make such baseless accusations, especially when the woman’s good-naturedness was so blindingly obvious-

Hold on.

"I would not stoop so low,” Marie responded. Her tone was defensive, but genuine.

“You don’t need to. You already have,” Arachne responded, not missing a beat. “Don’t think yourself free of guilt when you propagate the system that lead to this situation.”

Kid confusion slowly turned into realization as he began to understand his mother’s actions.

Any held-together person should have seen the hypocrisy in Arachne’s words. The Witch could easily be accused of so many crimes, so many ethical shortcomings with her involvement with the Kishin. Any average person could make the counter-argument that Arachne’s actions had lead them to this situation, and that they’re responding as best as they could. If Kid could see it, then Arachne was definitely aware of her erroneous rhetoric.

That wasn’t important though, because Arachne wasn’t trying to construct a sound argument. She was saying what Marie didn’t want to hear. She was trying and succeeding into getting into the
woman’s psyche, pulling the right strings to make her think the way Arachne wanted her to think—to what exact end goal, Kid wasn’t sure yet.

His mother was acutely aware of the blonde’s protective nature and she was using it against her.

Kid looked back at the other two Academy members who were watching the confrontation. Azusa’s expression hadn’t changed at all. The woman was incredibly stoic in general and Kid had no idea what she was thinking. Spirit looked conflicted though, and his forehead was wrinkled. Strange; Kid didn’t peg him for the protective type.

“Children shouldn’t be involved in this mess,” Marie eventually admitted, frowning. She glanced back at Kid only to look away almost immediately after.

"A bit too late for regrets now isn’t it?” the boy spoke up, tagging along. Arachne gave him a brief glance and the corners of her lips turned up just enough so that Kid could notice it.

"Hey,” Spirit spoke up, butting in the conversation, “we're doing our best-”

“No matter what you say, your words are empty,” Arachne swiftly responded. “My child is still here and he will be used as leverage.”

“If it was in our hands, we wouldn’t-” Marie began.

Arachne let out a small laugh. "This may have escaped your notice, but we are the captives here. You are our captors."

“Then why don’t you just say what you know if you’re that worried?” Spirit said in exasperation.

“Oh please. I am not as naïve as you are, or as you pretend to be.”

Marie gave Spirit a confused look, who the man reciprocated, while Azusa maintained her even gaze.

“The reason we are all still in one piece is because we still have valuable info and your patience hasn’t been stretched thin enough. The moment I have nothing to offer is the moment you dispose of us all.” Arachne continued in an even tone, causing Spirit to grimace in discomfort. “Letting your biggest enemy go free would be a foolish move after all, and everyone here knows it. You will not let us get out of here unscathed. By resisting, all I’m doing is putting off the inevitable and getting extraneous abuse thrown at me.”

The Witch paused and straightened her back and her face softened. Even when bound, she managed to maintain an air of regality.

“But if it means buying precious time for those I care about, then so be it. I can handle physical pain as long as he is safe.” Her small smile turned into a leer. “Unless I escape in which case there will be no hiding place for the people here.”

As the witch finished her monologue, Kid wondered how much of it was genuine. Lies mixed with truth were the most convincing type of lie after all.

The trio looked between the Witch and Kid, and the boy tried to make himself look as timid as possible. Not that he had to try much. Despite being here for some time, he was still unnerved, only that he was now used to feeling and could suppress it for the moments danger was relatively low.

“…Look,” Spirit began, looking back at his companions, who gave him silent nods. “We’ve been
giving this some thought. About your kid.”

Arachne tilted her head at them. “And?”

The man’s next words were careful. "Frankly, we don’t care what happens to you, or your two minions. You’ve killed a lot of people we were good friends with, and then some.”

Arachne nodded at the accusations without batting an eye.

“However…” Spirit took a steadying breath. “As a father, I can’t let them hurt someone’s kid, even if it’s yours.”

“So you want to help my child escape, but only him?” Arachne asked.

The three Deathscythes nodded.

“…Sounds fair,” the Witch said dispassionately.

“Mother you can’t-” Kid protested.

“Remember what I told you about seizing opportunities, Kid?” Arachne gave him an even look. “Now is such a moment-”

The boy frowned, wanting to protest but also making sure he wouldn’t give the Academy’s people any information they could use in the future. "Όχι,(No,)” Kid began, settling for speaking in a language hopefully the here adults didn’t understand. “Δε μπορώ (I can’t)-"

"Πρέπει, (You have to)," the Witch responded, easily switching to her mother tongue. “Μην ανησυχείς για μένα, έχω περάσει χειρότερα. Θα βρω τρόπο να ξεφύγω. (Don’t worry about me, I’ve been through worse. I’ll find a way to escape.) Το πιο σημαντικό είναι να βεβαιωθώ ότι θα είσαι ασφαλής. (The most important thing is to make sure you will be safe.)"

Spirit frowned at the exchange. "What are you two talking about?"

"Family matters.” The Witch didn’t bother looking at the man, giving Kid the universal ‘I’m-your-mother-and-my-word-is-law’ look.

“…You do care about the boy,” Azusa muttered, frowning.

Arachne didn’t respond to the woman’s statement. “This isn’t anywhere near settled. How do I know you will help? How do I know this is not one of Arthur’s elaborate theatrics?”

"Oi, do we look like we like that psycho?!" Spirit said in indignation.

"You like him well enough to have him around and interrogate high level prisoners.” Arachne’s stare evolved into a menacing glare. "As well as give him full range around my child." "That’s not up to us,” Azusa began. “There are many people in the Academy, each with their own goals.”

“Ah, so there is a split…” Arachne whispered to herself before speaking up. “You still haven’t answered my question.”

“Frankly we can’t, and you don’t have much of a choice. You said so yourself.” Azusa crossed her hands, narrowing her gaze. “Either you trust us, and we safely get your child out of here, or you don’t and you both perish.”
Arachne grimaced at the woman’s words.

“Geez Azusa, cool it down a bit.” Spirit looked between the two women in discomfort. "Ok um, we can tell you our plan for all it’s worth,” the man addressed the Witch. “We’ve been here for a long time and this place is old so it has lots of tunnels. Azusa knows them like the back of her hand.” He placed his hands on his hips as he looked among them. “If we time this correctly, there’s a small security gap between the shift changes. One of us can sneak in, undo the kid’s restraints, then guide him out of the Academy through the tunnel system.”

The plan didn’t sit well with Kid at all. These people wanted the Witch dead. They were noble enough to not let their grudge extend to Kid but the boy’s loyalty lay with his mother first and foremost. He couldn’t abandon her to their clutches. Even if he escaped, his mother’s fate would be sealed and he couldn’t allow that.

So, the question was, how could Kid make it so that his mother, Giriko and Mosquito escaped as well?

The most important part would be opening their cells. He would need the keys, and Kid was fairly certain Arthur carried a pair of each, since the man was able to enter all of them. So, one of the steps would be to immobilize Arthur, and get the keys. To do that, Kid would have to able to move independently, which would be an issue if one of the Deathscythes was with him. There must be one way to knock her out…

His Soul Wavelength. It worked with Giriko and he was a Weapon. Perhaps Kid would have to add a bit more power to overpower a Deathscythe, but it would work.

…Besides even if Kid added a bit too much power, and the person ended up sharing the same fate as the rat, it wouldn’t be a plan-breaking loss. Hopefully that wouldn’t happen, Kid didn’t want to kill any of them and the Deathscythes genuinely wanted to help him but… They still wanted his mother dead.

So, Kid could knock out the Deathscythe when they undid her restraints. After that he had the option to leave and try to track down Arthur himself, but Kid could easily get lost, not to mention his Soul Perception wasn’t advanced to the point where he could tell individual souls apart.

What Kid could do however, was wait. The Deathscythes mentioned they would act during the shift change, when Arthur came for his daily interrogations. The man always preferred to enter Kid’s cell first, perhaps as an intimidation tactic, but that habit would play in Kid’s advantage. The boy could immobilize the Meister guard and Arthur with his Soul Perception, get the keys and open the cells. The other guards would either already be in their respective cells, in which case mother, Giriko and Mosquito would be able to immobilize them without fear of repercussions. If not, they would head towards Kid, which would be a bit more inconvenient but not plan-destroying. Despite appearing weak, the teen knew how to fight, not to mention his new-found advantage with his Soul Wavelength. After that he would open the rest of the cells and let all figurative hell break loose, in the form of his mother.

Yes, that would work. Hopefully.

“…That’s acceptable,” Arachne conceded, her eyes narrowed.

The man turned to the boy. “Kid?"

The boy went over his plan once again in his head. “…I’m in."
The adult Weapons nodded to one another.

“So, we have a plan,” Spirit concluded.

Chapter End Notes

Comments are appreciated.
A few days had passed before Azusa came into Kid’s cell, her steps light and occasionally stealing paranoid glances behind her back.

“Hurry up,” Azusa said as she undid his bindings. “Arthur and his people should be here soon, we don’t have much time.”

Kid nodded as he flexed his shoulders and arms when the thick leather restrains fell down with an audible thump. He never thought being able to move more than his head would be so satisfying.

“Wait,” Kid grabbed a hold of the woman’s wrist when she began walking towards the exit. Kid’s wavelength bubbled under his skin.

Azusa turned, her guard down. “What is it-?”

Kid strengthened his grip, letting his wavelength loose.

Azusa’s last expression was one of shock before she fell down. Kid reeled back as well and let out a small cough as she observed the downed woman. Her chest still moved up and down, so he was still alive. Good, Kid didn’t have blood on his hands. Yet.

Arachne frowned in genuine shock. “Kid, what are you doing-!”?

“I’m helping you escape,” the boy quickly said, moving Azusa’s unconscious body to the side of the room while scanning the outside of his cell with his Soul perception. A group of blue souls was coming their way. As they approached, the souls split into three groups, with a group of three heading towards Kid’s cell’s entrance.

Meanwhile, Arachne looked ready to protest, but pursed her lips and gave Kid a trusting nod. With the Deathscythe unconscious, the Witch realized Kid’s lack of options.

Not that she wouldn’t scold him later for his recklessness when they got out.

Kid gritted his teeth as he positioned himself behind the door. He took a deep breath and reached within, calling once again upon his Soul Wavelength.

This time, the restraining feeling turned into one of nausea and he had to use one of the walls as support. Dammit, why the hell was this happening to him? He was supposed to improve when using his soul’s abilities, yet it felt as if he was trying to open a tap which only turned itself stubbornly shut every time he used it.
The door slowly creaked open and Kid focused back on the matters at hand. No matter what was going in, he had to stick to his plan. There was no going back now.

The first human walked in, holding a normal weapon -he was the first one to go.

Arthur stepped back and grabbed out his knife but Kid was faster, tackling the man on the floor and placing a firm hand on the adult’s chest. He called again on his soul, only to mildly panic at the lack of an immediate response. It was like trying to push clay through a very fine tube.

Arthur’s knife grazed his cheek, and was enough motivation for some of Kid’s wavelength to come through -it was too little, too weak- and the man let out a small cough as he fell backwards, breathing but unconscious.

Kid took a ragged breath after Arthur went limp. His attack felt weak, but the man was still unconscious. With shaking hands due to exhaustion and nerves, Kid undid the man’s jackets and began going through his pockets, until he came up with a rusty keychain with a multitude of keys.

Kid stood up running to his cell door and began trying keys. Behind him the world was beginning to devolve into chaos, the guards shouting at each other in alarm while Mosquito, Giriko and Arachne tried their best to undo their bindings. A small groan echoed from behind him, probably one of the guards, though the voice was familiar and Kid didn’t remember any of the guards actually taking-

“Kid-!” Arachne yelled but it was too late.

The keychain slipped from Kid’s hands as his knees buckled. A knife had embedded itself into his back and Kid lost all feeling from the waist below.

Kid painfully collided with the floor, laying on his side and facing the wall. His head was bleeding from hitting the floor hard, but this was nothing compared to the foreign numbness at his legs and lower back.

He frantically tried to get on his feet and failed, this time falling on his other side and getting a view of the other half of the cell.

The glass panes had darkened and Kid couldn’t see his mother and the others. There was blood near where he lay, probably his. But most importantly, Arthur was standing tall, stretching and running a hand through his hair.

When Arthur noticed the writhing boy, he clapped. "Well played. You almost had me."

At this moment a group of people burst through the cell. They carried a variety of weapons, including but not limited to a rifle, a sledgehammer, bats and a battle axe. They stopped their pursuit when they saw Arthur standing up and the Witch’s child on the floor with a knife in his back.

“At ease,” Arthur said to them nonchalantly. “I took care of it.”

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At this, a few of the weapons glowed before transforming into people. The axe and rifle didn’t.

“Ah man, the Weapon shortage is really affecting us, ain’t it?” Arthur casually commented. “Oh well, that’s not important right now,” he continued, switching his gaze to a Kid currently trying to regain his footing in vain. “Restrain his arms. Try not to get grabbed, the boy packs a mean Wavelength.”

Soon enough, Kid was face-first to the floor, two people holding him down by the arms and careful not to let the boy’s palms anywhere close to their body. A third one began wrapping a thick rope
around his wrists, restraining his hands one again.

“Gee Kid, you even managed to down a Deathscythe. Did you go easy on me, or am I really that tough?”

Another guard grabbed the bindings and brought them around Kid’s frame once more, trapping the boy and restraining his arms once more.

“Sir, this was undone…” a guard spoke up.

“We’ll figure it out later, don’t worry,” Arthur casually reassured her, as he looked down on the immobile but still struggling Kid. “Alright, I suppose that’s good enough. Get the Deathscythe out and lock the door behind you. Leave this to me.”

The guards did as told, though a couple seemed hesitant to do so, throwing worried looks at the child. Eventually though, Kid and Arthur were alone in the cell.

The man looked at Kid, who was still trying to fight back, pushing against his restraints to no avail.

“Keep fighting me and you’ll lose more than control of your legs, kiddo.”

Arthur kneeled next to Kid and removed the knife and a new flash of pain went through Kid’s frame.

“Let’s see, 1, 2, 3, 4…” Arthur traced his spine with the knife, the edge bumping as it passed over each vertebra. “Ah, C5. It’s quite up the hierarchy you know. Want to see what happens if it gets damaged?”

Kid would not cry. He would not give Arthur the satisfaction of crying. He could brace through this. There was something he could do, there had to be-

“One last chance. Where’s Death?” Arthur’s steady voice cut through Kid’s frantic metal rambling like a knife through butter.

Kid took a few deep breaths before responding. “I don’t know.”

“Augh!” Arthur leaned back in annoyance. “If you don’t know what’s the point of keeping you alive anymore? You’re no use to us…”

Arthur pushed the knife carefully, like a sculptor refining the details of a statue.

His breaths were failing him. Kid found himself unable to control them. His hands were trashing in the bindings, a vain attempt defence against the damage done to him.

Arthur gave the knife one final push and Kid’s arms became limp.

“Sorry kiddo but I couldn’t have you waving those arms around.”

Kid wanted to talk back. He wanted to yell, scream, curse at the man, do anything that could cause Arthur harm. Yet his breaths were too shallow and it took all his strength to maintain a steady breathing a pattern, let alone talk.

A resounding bang came from one of the glass panes and Arthur almost jumped in surprise.

“Time to have that family reunion I guess.” Arthur walked up to one of the glass panes. After performing a rhythmic tapping, the glass cleared to reveal a dishevelled and frantic Arachne.
She was standing up, her body half-dissolved into spiders where her bindings were. One of the academy’s members lay on the side of the wall, his uniform half-eaten and his whole body covered by black arachnids. Some of the arachnids formed back into Arachne, leaving behind bones with nary a tissue in sight.

Arachne honed in on Kid, eyes wide. She locked eyes with her child, only to briefly break the connection when she glanced above his neck where the knife was.

“No-Kid!”

“He’s alive, ain’t you boy?” Arthur said as he walked back to Kid. He pulled at his hair, making the teen grimace in pain and bringing his face up.

If Arachne got any relief from that, it didn't show in her expression.

“Let. Him. Go.” She growled, like a predator facing its prey.

Arthur gave her a little laugh. “Let him go? The boy just tried to escape.” Arthur stood up and walked towards the back of Kid’s cell, away from the boy’s sight. “I’m just doing like any parent should, punishing him so he won't do it again.” There was the sound of metal clanking against rock, after which Arthur's footsteps resumed towards Kid’s direction. Arachne’s expression shifted from fury to fear.

“What did you do?”

“Sorry, was I supposed to ask for your permission? Stuff like this is why’d make a bad dad,” Arthur said nonchalantly, letting out a small laugh.

Kid, not wanting to face his mother being helpless like this, used whatever few muscles he could control to turn his head and look at Arthur. Out of the corner of his eye, Kid saw the man dragging an axe by him.

Arthur noticed Kid’s paling face and gave the boy a smirk.

"That’s quite the wavelength your kid has," he addressed Arachne while looking at Kid. The man clicked his tongue as he brought the axe to his shoulder and walked closer to the boy. "Shame it will be so short-lived-"

“Stop it!” Arachne yelled banging her fist against the glass with murder in her eyes.

“I will, if you tell me-”

“Death, I know!” the Witch yelled, cutting the man off. “I will tell you all there is.”

At this, Arthur paused, putting the sharp edge of the axe against the floor, as if it was a cane.

Arachne gave the man a death glare, but began her explanation nonetheless. “I detected a presence in my castle, I but could not pinpoint its location. Your use of location spells is archaic; I can provide you with ones made of higher guilty and in time construct one which will show you the source of the presence-”

“So you don’t keep Death chained beneath the castle like the Kishin did before…” Arthur slowly said, cutting through Arachne’s frantic explanation.

“That’s ridiculous, I don’t have that power,” the Witch said dismissively. “I didn’t even know about
the Grim Reaper’s presence before your people stormed my base.”

“In that case…” the man trailed off and walked right by where Kid lay.

In dawning realisation, what little muscles Kid could control started shaking. His breaths became frantic, and his difficulty of breathing combined with the resurfaced feeling he had felt the night before the attack, led to a coughing fit.

Kid could only watch helplessly as Arthur picked up the axe. His mother was shouting, but Kid couldn't quite focus on what was being said.

Arachne pounded on the glass with all her might. Magic crackled at her fingertips yet the glass held strong.

“No!” The Witch pounded on the glass again and again in desperation. “I told all there is to know, I'm not hiding anything-!”

“Oh, I doubt you are,” Arthur said as he stood on Kid’s side, facing the Witch. “That’s not your punishment dear…” There was a mad grin on Arthur’s face as he raised the weapon above Kid’s limp form, who could only watch with wide eyes.

“I just like killing.”

The axe fell and blood flew.

Chapter End Notes

Hello everyone, hope you 'enjoyed' this chapter >:D As always, comments and kudos are appreciated.

In other news, my first entry for Resbang 2018 is up! Opening up Resbang 2018 posting season, you have:

Book of Eibon: Safe Edition

Summary:

[POST MANGA] Maka copied the legible parts of the Book of Eibon seeking answers. Instead, she comes across peculiar directories, vague musings, confounding retellings, illegible paragraphs, horrifying prototypes and two simple lists of names.

Pairing: None/Gen

Rating: G

Warnings: Vague cosmic horror stuff

In addition to that, look forward for my 2nd entry that will be posted on January 5th:

Title: Stranded

Summary:
[POST MANGA] Black Star and Kid find themselves mysteriously stranded on Atlantis. While Black Star awakes in a golden village and is hailed as a Hero and of love, unyielding', Kid awakes underwater in a lifeless stygian temple and demanded of 'murder, the inevitable' of Kid. The two must reconcile or everyone will find themselves dragged deep into the depths of a dying island.

Pairing: Queerplatonic Black Star/Death the Kid

Rating: PG-13/T

Warnings: Attempted murder of major character, lots of off-screen murder

And then there are all the other amazing entries that will be posted in between and after! So get reading and aw’ing at all the neat prose and art folks! :P
Arachne was no stranger to loss. She had lost count of how many family friends, companions and acquaintances had been murdered, executed, or were simply outlived by the old Witch.

However, she thought she had put these days behind her. She was powerful now, and that power allowed her to protect those close to her. Sure, some Arachnophobia members were running on borrowed time; Giriko or Mosquito might one day get an assignment that was above their abilities. Such were things when you ran one of the world’s most powerful organisations. The increased risk acted as a counterbalance to the increased power.

However, this shouldn’t apply to Kid. He was young, inexperienced and not even involved in the matters of Arachnophobia. The only connection he had was with Arachne who had decided to take full responsibility of him fourteen years ago. Arachne had ordained herself as the boy's mother and it was her duty to keep him safe, her responsibility.

Yet she could only watch helplessly as the axe came down until it collided with flesh in a sickening lurch.

Arachne must have screamed but her perception had been heavily distorted. The one thing she remembered early was Arthur picking up the axe with practiced ease. In front of him near his legs a sizeable puddle of blood was already starting to form, staining the man’s floor-length trousers. Arthur's back was turned to her, meaning Kid’s head and neck were not in Arachne's line of sight. The blood that came out later was, though.

Arachne wanted to mourn. It would be disrespectful if she didn’t do so.

However, she didn’t know any way of mourning that didn’t involve taking her grief out at the ones responsible for it. She wouldn’t cry, an old soul like hers never did, no matter how strongly she wanted to. As the world kept reminding her, existence was cruel.

Arachne had never had a child before, at least not one in the traditional sense. True, she did not give birth to Kid, but these things were technicalities which only narrow-minded fools paid attention to. Arachne was the one who raised Kid, taught how to walk and read. She was the one the boy turned to when he was afraid of ‘monsters snatching his soul’ at just five years of age.

Taking Kid in and raising him was the one decent thing she had done, an act that didn’t entail murder, torture or any other muddy ethics. She had made a small promise to herself that day when she found a half-dead baby, surrounded by the remains of her ultimate enemy. That she would protect him and nurture him, mostly because the child deserved a chance in life and also to show the world and herself that she wasn’t the monster of old folklore. That she had the ability for compassion
and care. That she was able to do good, and that her vision for the world was not one of senseless destruction, as many attributed to her, but a place where people could people could be themselves, without fearing repercussions from the supposed Gods and self-proclaimed moralists.

Dammit all, even now she was thinking about herself. This wasn’t fair, especially towards Kid. After all, it was he who paid the price for Arachne’s actions, her mishandling of Medusa’s vague claim that started a chain of events she could have stopped but was too blind to.

Kid didn’t deserve this. He didn’t deserve any of this. The boy was good, a genuinely good soul. Despite harmless eccentricities, he never caused trouble. Arachne had been genuinely surprised and did her best to ensure Kid had a good childhood. She had been grateful, but also afraid. Scared of what her own twisted nature may inflict on the child’s psyche.

So Arachne had kept secrets. She hadn’t told him anywhere close of what she had accomplished. She had never outright lied, but she had hid things and misdirected. She didn’t want to burden the child with her sins. She didn’t want him to hate her.

Because of that, Kid had risked his life to save her and…

It was all gone now.

Arachne screamed and pounded at the glass. Her magic was released in manic waves, pulsing vainly against her prison. The only thing that stopped her from unleashing her Madness Wavelength was that she wanted to have a clear head once she literally ripped the man to shreds just so that she could at least get the satisfaction of revenge.

Arthur must have noticed her struggle for Arachne found herself lurching forwards, nausea briefly overtaking her as a red substance dripped from the ceiling. Later on, she would realise it was pig’s blood combined with a few anti-witchcraft herbal mixtures, an arcane last-ditch attempt at weakening a Witch. They really were scared of her, as they should be.

As Arachne felt her senses dull, one thought was repeated like a mantra in her mind. She would make them rue the day they hurt her child.

A small crack formed at the bottom of the glass, barely visible. A set of keys disregarded on the side, pushed in a small crack connecting her child’s cell to the outside, a tiny cavern in which a black goblin spider spun its web in its nest.

Her wounds would heal with time. They always did.

When they did, Arachne would destroy the Academy the same way she destroyed Death.

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They were fighting and they were losing, or so they thought. The world was a blur of black and red, blurry and unfocused, as if looking through broken glass of a broken Order.

(He was fighting and he was winning, or so he thought. The world was a blur of stygian black, sharp and abysmal, occasionally reflecting his face like a mirror made of Fear.)

They felt anger, annoyance, disgust and disappointment. There were so many emotions and they were experiencing them all at once, like a cocktail made up of the strongest of spirits. They didn’t experience fear though. They couldn’t. They couldn’t feel fear ever again.

(He only felt Fear. He hadn’t known any other emotion in the first place, he could never do so.)
The blurs were accompanied by sounds. They were booming but unintelligible, like a raging
thunderstorm. Cries of pain and triumph merged together as hordes of orbs fought each other, blue
and purple and red barely indistinguishable from their yellow (his red). The smaller orbs weren’t
important after all, not in the grand scheme of things. What mattered now was the red (yellow), their
(his) biggest failure (fear) and the one being they (he) truly wanted to obliterate.

It was all that Witch’s fault, feeding his already fragile mind with lies and paranoia.

(The Witch only told him what he already knew deep inside but refused to acknowledge. The truth
about his accursed existence, about the plans his creator held in store for him.)

They were fighting and they were winning, or so they thought.

(He was fighting and he was losing, or so he thought.)

A well-positioned spell and spider webs encircled their form. The blurs stopped moving and the
world came into a sharp focus as the red lunged towards them.

(A well-positioned magic circle and spider webs encircled his form. The blurs stopped moving and
the world came into a sharp focus as the yellow lunged towards them.)

T H - H E - E Y W E R E S H A T T E R I N G

Chapter End Notes

    Real Angst Hours in here

    Comments are appreciated.
Chapter Notes

Link to playlist: https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PL5NETqX6IwDY07_D49mrOgqtZ5YSSCdFS

Don't forget to listen to the songs!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Arachne had not uttered a word ever since she had woken up.

Arthur had tried talking to her but the Witch hadn’t responded. It wasn’t as if he could hurt her anymore; he was too scared to enter her cell. Everyone in the Academy was too scared to enter her cell.

It was pathetic. Their false sense of security would be their doom.

A skeleton ripped clean of tissue and ligaments was collapsed to the side or cell, but it wasn’t enough. It wouldn’t be enough until Arachne’s spiders were eating through every single one of the Academy’s damned members.

Her prison was being reinforced but Arachne paid it no heed. Thick pig’s blood oozed from the ceiling, mixed with certain ingredients that caused her skin to burn. Arachne’s soul would have doubled over in discomfort if it could, but the Witch sat motionless in her chair, as if dead to the world.

From her spider’s eyes, she saw the emptiness of the hallway her cell door was. From what her little goblin spiders had explored, the closest guards were at the end of the hallway, behind another reinforced door.

It was a hard task, but the spiders, through a combination of sheer numbers and a few strategically placed cobwebs, slowly brought the keys up to the lock, and inserted the key that would unlock her door. The most difficult part was rotating the key; the spiders came together and formed a system of pulleys, all of them moving as once. Even if some of the spider’s exoskeletons were crushed by the pressures forced on them, the horde continued its task.

In the meantime, while part of Arachne was satisfied by her progress, a bigger part berated her plan all along.

She should have informed Kid that Arachne managed to gain control of a spider small enough to escape the Academy’s extermination efforts, and that slowly but surely Arachne would have manage to escape.

She shouldn’t have kept so many secrets.

“Mosquito, Giriko.”

The two men whipped their heads at her in surprise, this being the first time the old Witch had spoken since the incident with Kid.
“Milady!”

“Boss, I swear I’m going to find a way out and rip those bastards apart-!”

“Quiet Giriko,” Arachne hissed at the man. Right now she had to have a clear head; she couldn’t allow herself to wallow in sorrow and botch her operation.

“Prepare yourselves,” Arachne said as she stood up, her body dissolving into countless spiders where her bindings were supposed to keep her before reforming into her human form.

Behind her, the door of her cell opened with a loud creak, the mass of spiders that had made this possible falling to the ground and mixing with the rest of Arachne.

Arachne allowed herself a sadistic smile and walked out of her cell and into the hallway ending up in a reinforced door. It was the only expression she could form besides seething in indignation. How childish they had to be, thinking they could contain her? They thought they could keep her locked up and hurt her family without retribution?

Already her spiders, black widows because she wanted the guard to suffer in excruciating pain before killing him, swarmed through the miniscule cracks between the stone and metal. They descended upon the guard, biting him multiple times so as to incapacitate him immediately. Some of her other spiders then took the keys from his person and used them to unlock the door, allowing Arachne to step outside and look down at the terrified and convulsing guard with utter contempt.

“You are the first of many,” Arachne hissed, ordering more of her spiders to bite the man, while a couple of her tarantulas descended down his gullet to prevent him from screaming and raising an alarm.

The other guards met similar fates, rendered writhing in pain and unable to yell by Arachne’s spiders. The Witch reacted to their presence with barely hidden contempt, as if she was looking at ants. Just like ants are an unappetizing meal to spiders, so these people’s deaths would do little to quell her fury at those who had hurt her child.

It was laughable how easy it was for her to acquire the keys to Giriko’s and Mosquito’s cells from the dying bodies of the guards. She felt a bit patronised. Perhaps they had mistaken her silence for weakness? Perhaps they thought her so weak that they assumed she would have broken down and waited for Death to claim her?

Idiots. They had only signed their own death warrant.

“Milady!” came her loyal manservants voice, joined by Giriko’s as the two frantically made their way towards her. They ignored the convulsing and slowly suffocating guards, though Giriko’s gaze had lingered at one of them and there was the ghost of a smile on his face. Within seconds, Mosquito was bowing at his Master, while Giriko faced her head-on.

“Let’s go take out the rest of these rotten bastards-!”

“Milady, we have to escape-!”

“Silence,” Arachne cut them off, her voice cold and cruel, to the point where her two lackeys had taken a step back. The Witch’s gaze was penetrating, eyes wide that served as a reminder why she was one of the most feared Witches in existence.

“This is a rare case in which I agree with Giriko.” Arachne smiled at them, a stilted cold and menacing smile. “Don’t hold back.”
On a level, Arachne knew that her actions were but empty gestures. It was a mindless plan of action, one that would bring her short-term satisfaction without actually accomplishing anything. A blind fury that would never fill the hole on her heart.

Arachne didn’t care though. She was past the point of caring.

“We will slaughter each and every one of them.”

Kid woke up in darkness. At first he thought it was a dream, but his dreams weren’t accompanied by an overwhelming stench of rotting bodies and the sound of bones banging against stone.

The world was still blurry.

The boy tried to stand up only for his head to collide with something solid before he could even fully prop himself up with his elbows. Kid fell back down and brought up his hands to examine the black space around him.

Soon enough his hands reached a ceiling. It was made of stone and was full of crevices and irregularities, as if it had been carved from stone. It was a bit taller than the length of Kid’s forearm. The boy touched walls behind his head and around him, both also uncomfortably close to him. He kicked with his legs only to find another wall.

He was trapped.

His skin felt itchy.

The boy shook his head and closed his eyes for a few moments. Kid wasn’t claustrophobic but his breaths were shallow and fast from his tiny trap. His arms and legs twitched as he needlessly confirmed with baited breath that he could move them.

He laid his head down among the darkness and let out a small relieved laugh. He never thought he would be so glad of having basic motor skills.

The relief was soon replaced by dread when the rest of his memories came back.

He recalled the events that led him to this situation and traced his neck. There was no scar, which only sent his mind racing. He remembered the fear, he remembered being pushed down, of an axe slicing his neck and regardless of how he had healed there had to be a scar-!

He ran his hands across his neck again and this time he traced an irregularity spanning across its base. Ok good. This must have been where the axe got him. However, wasn’t his neck supposed to be completely detached from his body? Not to mention-

The boy pushed against the walls. The one on his feet was solid, same for the walls on his sides. However, the wall against his head seemed to be made up of wood and echoed hollow when Kid knocked on it. This had to be it, his escape route.

Kid had forgotten for how long he was punching the wooden panel. It may have been an hour; it may have been a day. His knuckles were bruised and bloody, while feet were sore and the rest of his body had gone numb from lack of movement.

Eventually the wood gave out with a splintering sound and fell off. Kid was too absorbed by his achievement that he didn’t notice that there wasn’t a sound of the wood reaching ground.
He pushed his head out and took a deep breath of the less stale air. The stench of corpses was still strong but not as overwhelming as before.

Sight was slightly better. Though it was still dark and a dark mist further reduced vicinity, there were a few weak sources of light. Stands of candles were fixed on regular intervals. Some had gone out or where completely melted, but most persisted as they illuminated the rock.

Kid couldn't see anything opposite of him; the mist was too thick. Same went for above or at his sides; only countless stacks of the same cover repeated over and over.

Kid looked down.

Black, he was black, the red breaking through him like scissors tearing through paper.

A brief sense of vertigo briefly overtook him and Kid stumbled back, his hand unconsciously pushing back from the exit while a thin layer of sweat made itself apparent.

There was nothing. There was only an abyss which seemed to stretch out forever and expand the more he looked at it.

Kid looked back in his confinement. He wasn’t afraid of heights but the sight was giving him vertigo. It wouldn’t be an easy way down, if there even was a down.

Plus, the knocking sounds were proving to be really distracting. Knocking was everywhere. They were out of sync with each other, but there were so numerous that it sounded like a constant, desperate thump.

The Order was broken and so were they-

Kid briefly clutched his forehead and let out as shaky breath. He couldn’t focus well on reality. Whenever his concentration broke, he got this overwhelming feeling of wrongness, like he had been forced into deep sleep and woke up in a completely unknown and incomprehensible environment.

…Which was what was going on right now. Except… it didn’t feel right to attribute the feeling to this situation.

Kid shook his head, dispelling these thoughts. He shouldn’t let this place get to him. Mother wouldn’t.

With care and dread, Kid slowly got out, grabbing the handle of another case above him. He used the handle as a support and slowly got the rest of his body out.

Good, now he was hanging above the abyss.

Honestly, the situations he found himself in.

Slowly Kid was climbing down the cases. His supports were the small protrusions used as knobs to open and close the... Kid supposed they were coffins. Unfortunately, some of the protrusions were damaged over time and brittle. There was more than one occasion where Kid stepped on one and it fell into the great void below. There was nothing he could do at this point than start cursing loudly, but that would be distracting.

A handle in one his hands cracked and fell away. Kid leaned dangerously backwards before he put more pressure on his other joints and brought himself up.
Cursing was becoming more desirable by the moment.

Shaking his head, Kid continued with his descent. The floor of the cavern remained obscured, but Kid knew he was making progress. If he looked up, he could see from where he started, which was quite a way up. The constant knocking had bled to the background, like distant war drums in a battlefield. Looking down again, Kid’s gaze lingered on the abyss.

They were falling.

Kid stopped halfway, gaze unfocused. His vision blurred while his Soul Perception came into an unexpectedly sharp focus. Grey-blue souls were everywhere, including two roughly where he was. He also saw blue souls, but they were away, except for one to his right -a guard perhaps, an exit?

Breaking.

His hold on the handle faltered. His hands felt cold and unresponsive, stiff like a corpse’s.

Dwindling.

He felt heavy. His own breath sounded wrong. Superfluous.

Fading.

He tried to get a better hold of his support, yet his hands slipped through, as if they were made of smoke.

Disappearing.

His knees buckled and his dangling heel slipped off the ledge.

Dying.

His world spun, a mix of nausea and numbness. He wasn’t sure how he hadn’t fallen yet, perhaps there was a part of him that still held on. His right shoulder hurt, probably that was the only reason he wasn’t plunging down.

It was over-

No! He had to do something -anything- there had to be something but his grip was faltering and his unresponsive feet were dangling over the abyss.

As Kid’s panic increased, the numbness subsided even if briefly. This made him aware of the great strain his right hand was on, the bone and muscle straining as they were the only support he now had, looking much like one of those depressing motivational posters of a hanging kitten. Kid slowly brought his free hand up, faintly trying to grasp at one of the edges, yet his fingers jerked uncontrollably at thin air, disoriented.

They had lost-

Goddammit, now was not the time to doze off, this was a matter of life and death, and he was desperate, his soul was pulsing-

Two pairs of hands broke through the wood and grabbed his wrists.
I used goblin spiders because so far it’s theorised that some of the spiders in that family (Oonopidae) reproduce via parthenogenesis (a form of asexual reproduction). For the purposes of this fic, assume that Arachne's magic allows them to reproduce and grow faster and larger than normal.

Comments are appreciated.
Two pairs of hands were holding Kid by the wrists, preventing him from plunging to his death. One pair was rough but feminine and its long nails dug into the boy’s skinny wrist. The other was just as rough, with shorter nails grasping him much more strongly. Both were bloody with splinters and other debris embedded in them.

Kid let out a sharp breath, his fingers having stopped jerking uncontrollably though his mind was still foggy and he barely moved. From what he could see, the hands had broken through the wood, yet the majority of the structure remained intact.

Eventually, one of the hands was about to let go and Kid grabbed it back, out of desperation and fear.

“What the fuck-?” came a female voice from where the pair of hands protruded from the wall on Kid’s right-hand side.

“Sis?” a younger voice came from the other side.

“Patty?” the first voice replied hesitantly. “Patty, is that you?!” The right pair of hands clutched Kid’s hand with renewed vigour.

“Sis!” The left pair of hands also tightened their grip around Kid’s wrist. “I’m so glad to hear you. It’s so dark here!”

“Oh great, so it’s just as dark outside,” the older voice grumbled. “Hey Patty, now that you’re out, help me out as well alright? I can bring you up as much as I can.”

“Eh? Sis, this place is too small for you to fit in, silly!”

“…What?”

“Don’t worry, old Patty’s not letting you go!”

“Letting me go-? Patty, I’m the one holding…” the voice trailed off in drawing horror. “Patty?” The hand holding Kid’s right wrist gave the wrist a slight squeeze. “Did you feel that?”

“Feel what sis? Also, can you come up soon? My hand’s getting tired~”

“Patty, you’re not holding me,” the older voice sad in abject horror. “And I’m not holding you…”

“Please don’t drop me,” Kid spoke up.
Which was exactly the right pair of hands tried to do, retracting from Kid as if they had been electrified. Fortunately for the boy, he had grabbed hold of one of the hands and was now grasping it as hard as he could without outright crashing it. Fortunately, the left pair of hands hadn’t tried to let him go, though the tightness of their grip was waning…

“Sis?” came the bubbly voice. “Did ya hear that?”

“What the fuck-?!” the older voice screeched as her free hand retreated back through the hole in the wood. There was a small period of silence between the voices, as the pounding continued. It was soon joined by the wood on Kid’s right-hand side, until the material gave up on his hinges.

Kid arched his head out of the way of the falling wood. Where the… ‘door’ once was, he could only see an abyss from where the pale hand stretched out.

Soon enough a blonde head appeared from the gap, wide-eyed and thoroughly unsettled. Her hair was dirty and dishevelled, and her skin was in a similar state, marred with patches of dirt and light wounds.

The girl quickly took note of her surroundings, eyeing the place around them, before her blue eyes fell on Kid and the two pairs of hands that were holding him -one of them involuntary.

Her expression from one of horror to confusion eventually settling for growing anger.

“Who the fuck are you?!”

“Sis?” came the younger voice again. “What’s going on?”

“Patty, open your hands!”

“No-” Kid began.

“But then I’d drop you silly!”

“That’s not me you’re holding!” the girl yelled, jerking her hands trying to shake Kid off.

“Oh, I see!”

“Please don’t.” Kid quickly said, his voice strained.

The left pair of hands slowly loosened their grip. “Sorry stranger, but sis said to let you go~”

With the older girl trying to shake him off as if he was a particularly annoying fly while the other one’s hold had gotten slack, Kid was the one holding onto the two for dear life like he was the protagonist of a black-and-white comedy movie. At his ridiculous predicament, no less helped by the two girl’s antics, Kid’s fear gave rise to indignation and anger.

“Do not dare let me go,” the boy growled, feeling his soul flair up in accordance with his bubbling emotions.

The two pairs of hands stopped their theatrics and grasped at Kid’s wrists immediately after.

The older teen gave him a sneer, opening her mouth but then closing it immediately and her face morphed into a grimace. Her angry expression briefly broke apart to reveal dread, as the girl looked at her hand as if it had staged a coup.

“W-what the fuck...?”
“If you let me go, you won’t be able to escape this place,” Kid lied. Truth be told, he had no idea of
the girls’ capabilities and had little knowledge of this place’s layout. However, if lying about his
usefulness made the two not drop him, Kid might as well paint himself as MacGyver’s prodigy
apprentice.

“Wait, no, how did you, who are-?”

“That’s not important,” Kid quickly responded, disregarding the strange phenomenon that had just
occurred as his mother’s authoritativeness rubbing off on him. “You need me to get out of here.”

At this, the older teen blinked a couple of times, as if registering the position she was in. She paled
when she looked past Kid and into the abyss. “Where are we…?” she said breathlessly and
immediately rubbed her temple with her free hand. “Augh, my head feels like it’s been through a
blender.”

“We're somewhere in the Academy. Somewhere underground I think.”

“Academy…?” The older teen repeated numbly. “How the fuck…?”

Kid narrowed his eyes at the girl’s confused look. If this place was what Kid thought it was, and
these two were stuck there as well… “What's the last thing you remember?”

“That's what I'm trying to figure out, asshole,” the older teen snapped at him, eyeing her hand
holding Kid up as if it'd betrayed her and using the free one to rub her forehead. “But first…”

In a daring gesture that renewed Kid’s desire to curse, she pushed herself further out of her cell, to
the point where her chest was protruding from the tiny coffin-cell hybrid.

She twisted her back at an uncomfortable angle and fiddled with the hinges of the door to no success.
“Dammit, it's stuck.” She looked back on her own unit, where fragments of the wooden door where
still attached to the hinges, remnant from when her hand broke through the wood to reach Kid.

“How the fuck did I punch through the wood in the first place?” the teen muttered to herself before
speaking up. “Patty, I'm gonna try to get you out too, but I need your help.”

“Okey dokey sis, what do you want me to do?”

“Gonna need you to punch or kick the wooden door to get it unstuck and force it open.”

“With pleasure!”

For the next few moments, a demented giggle joined in the constant knocking before resounding
thumps echoed from the entrance where the younger sister was. Eventually, the wood cracked and
fell apart, revealing a round face with big blue eyes, short blonde hair and a wicked grin.

“Sis!

“Patty!”

The two sisters used their free hand to embrace each other in an overly dramatic fashion. Kid
watched the whole exchange with a wary expression, still dangling over the abyss.

“Um, excuse me.”

The older sister's joyful expression gave away to one of frustration and she looked down at Kid. “Ah
right, we got you to worry about.”
“Who’s he, sis?”

The older sister’s upper lip curled in annoyance. “No clue.”

“I’m Kid,” the boy quickly began. “What are your names?” He knew the younger one’s name was Patty, but the older one had only been referred to as ‘sis’ so far.

“None of your damn business-”

“I’m Patty, this is my sis, Liz!” the younger teen said, ignoring her sister’s protest.

Kid nodded at the information. Now that he knew their names, he could start building up rapport with them and hopefully establish a better reason for them letting him go that just ‘because I said so’.

Though it surprised Kid that the sisters were receptive to that in the first place.

“First of all, thank you for letting me hold on-”

“Oh, so you’re thankful now?” Liz began, her voice thick with sarcasm. “How about you thank me by letting go?”

Kid held back a wince. Great, so it was back to square one with those two. “If you want to lose your only chance of escaping from this place, so be it,” he said slowly and deliberately, trying to muster some bravado despite his ridiculous predicament. “Hope you enjoy being stuck here for the rest of eternity.”

Liz was about to protest that, but was stopped by her younger sister’s cheer.

“Yay, so we got a guide too!” Patty let out a small giggle but her smile was stilted. “Let’s get out of here sis! Then we can give this guy our welcoming gift!”

Kid frowned. Welcoming gift? What would those two offer as a ‘gift’?

Liz’s expression softened at the mention of a gift, and Liz gave her sister a barely perceptible leer. “Fine.” Liz turned to look at Kid, and any traces of her previous expression were gone, replaced by a neutral frown. “So, how do we get out of here?”

Chapter End Notes

Comments are appreciated.
After plenty of manoeuvring and some rather impressive acrobatics accompanied by a lot of cussing, Kid and the sisters reached a small stone scaffold on the edge of the weird place they had found themselves in.

“That was fun!” Patty exclaimed once they made a safe landing while Liz all but crumbled and attempted to hug the floor.

Kid didn’t answer, choosing to take note of his surroundings.

They were on a dodgy scaffold that overlooked the vast abyss of the cavern. The scaffold’s wood blended into the stone, old rooting wood giving way to smoothed rock. There was an opening that lead into the rock, the stone corridor being illuminated by an oil lamp mounted almost out of sight.

“Ok, we made it through.” Liz glanced behind her, seeing the gaping abyss, and gulped.

Patty glanced at Kid before turning to Liz with a big grin. “Sis, is it ‘surprise’ time yet-?”


Liz frowned. "How do you...?"

"Soul Perception."

Liz's frowned only deepened. "Hell's that?"

"I can see souls." Kid inclined his head towards the narrow corridor. "There's one ahead of us." He narrowed his eyes. “Maybe a guard.”

Liz smirked. "Heh. You're a weird kid, huh?" She put her hands on her hips and looked at the path. "Anyone else in there?"

Kid shook his head. "I can only sense one soul close to us. Besides the..."

The pounding made his ears ache.

Kid bit down his tongue and went quiet.

Liz raised an eyebrow Kid’s silence. "Well." She turned her gaze to the corridor and let out a predatory smirk. "That's not too hard.”

Next to her, Patty let out a small giggle. The two sister's gazes met and in a flash of light, Liz was
clutching a semi-automatic pistol.

“Patricia’s a weapon?” Kid asked in surprise, looking over Patty’s weapon form while Liz quietly made her way further into the tunnel.

“Sis is one too!” the younger Thompson whispered, her voice having a metallic ring to it. “We’re twin pistols!”

Patty went quiet when Liz raised her hand and Kid copied the younger sister. He could hear the echo of the human’s footsteps and saw a faint humanoid shadow on the stone where the corridor opened up to a rectangular room.

Liz looked at Kid expectantly and the boy tilted his head to the direction of the potential guard. Liz nodded and her body coiled like a spring. Kid reached down to grab a pebble and threw it across the room.

There was some muttering and the shadow on the wall moved, briefly revealing the unknown individual. They were a man, tall but a bit out of shape. He wore minimum armour, but there was a gun to his belt, along with a walkie-talkie and a big collection of keys.

With no warning, Liz sprang out of her hiding place, shot the man in the leg, kicked his other one and tackled him to the ground. The man felt down with a resounding thump and the contents of his belt, gun included, scattered to his side. Liz sat on top of him and shoved Patty under his chin, her finger on the trigger.

“W-what-“ the man stuttered, giving a wide-eyed look at Liz. His hand reached out for his gun but Kid kicked it away, towards the corridor where it plunged into the abyss.

Liz glanced at Kid with an unreadable expression. “Thanks for the assist.”

“What are you doing?” Kid asked, frowning at the downed man. “Why haven’t you knocked him out yet?”

“I'm getting some actual info from the guy, what do you think, genius?” With a smirk, she turned to the man and pressed Patty harder against his chin. “So, big guy,” Liz said in a mock conversational tone. “I’m gonna ask some questions, and you’d better answer.”

“Yeah do what big sis says, or we'll make you squeal like a pig!”

The guard grew paler at the threat and vigorously nodded.

Liz’s smile widened. “Where are we?” She looked up where the short corridor lead to the dark cavern. “What’s this damn place?”

The guard stuttered some incomprehensible words. Liz’s scowl deepened and she pushed Patty harder against the man’s neck. “Answer before I shoot something off.”

The guard’s words grew more desperate and high-pitched. “Y-you… storage-not s-supposed to move-!”

“Storage?” Liz hissed. “Is that why we were stuck in a goddamn matchbox-!”

“And you weren’t supposed to get out!” the man screeched. “Oh Death, I'm gonna end up like you-!”

“What the fuck are you talking about?”
“How did you get out?!”

“Me and sis punched our way out!” Patty said.

“That’s… How…?” The guards gaze travelled to Liz’s blister-filled wrists then to her face. “Y-you don’t look like a c-c-corpse.”

Liz scoffed. “You’re not the pinnacle of health too, buddy. Now cut the chit-chat. How do we get out?”

Kid reached down and grabbed the keys. “We’ll need those.”

The guard's gaze fell on Kid for the first time and his eyes widened. “O-Oh, Death… y-you’re-!”

“Famous?” Liz cut him off with a smirk as she glanced at Kid.

“Arachne’s child!”

Kid rolled his eyes. “I have a name you know.”

“Arachne’s…?” Liz repeated and turned to look at Kid as if she was seeing him for the first time. Kid crossed his arms and stared back.

“Hey sis, isn’t Arachne one of the Witch bitc-?”

“Hush Patty!”

Kid’s stare turned into a glare. “What did you just call mother-?”

“Nothing-nothing!” Liz quickly said. “Last thing I want is your folks on my ass,” she muttered to herself. Kid narrowed his eyes further.

“Y-You can’t be…” the guard stuttered. “Your head was cut off!”

Kid brought a hand to his popped collar and traced the irregularity that spanned his neck.

Liz glanced between Kid and the guard and shrugged. “Looks attached to me.”

“N-No, I swear-!” The guard glanced between Liz and Kid. “How on Earth did you-?”

“You’re not in any position to ask questions,” Kid said, narrowing his eyes at the man.

“B-but you-”

As the man’s words dissolved into more unintelligible mumbling, Kid let out a frustrated sigh. This was taking too long. The more time he wasted here…

Kid brought his foot down on the man’s right hand, hard. He tried his best to ignore the man’s pained cries. Tried. “How do we get out?”

The man let out a stream of incoherent cries.

Kid’s face fell for a brief second before it was replaced by a blank mask. He applied more pressure to his foot.

Liz glanced at the boy but did not speak.
“E-exit, there’s a staircase that leads up, have mercy-!”

“Where’s the staircase?”

“T-take the door on the right…” The guard used his free hand to gesture to one of the doors in the room. “Keep g-going straight, you can’t m-m-miss it…” the guard looked up to Kid and Liz. “Please, I’ll do anything!”

Kid removed his foot from the hand, satisfied. He gave a slight flinch when he saw the crushed fingers beneath and looked at the other door in the room where he hoped the guard’s room was. Maybe he had a first-aid kit lying around…

“Now, what to do with you?” came Liz voice.

“Oh Death, I beg of you-”

Liz sneered. “Dunno if you’re begging to the right guy now pal. Then again you Death worshipers confuse the ever-loving shit out of me…” She angled Patty to get a better look at his face. “Shouldn’t you want this?”

“Cut it out,” Kid spoke up.

Liz paused her spiel and gave a confused look to the boy. “Eh?”

“We got what we wanted.” Kid looked down at the man, then at the exit. “We’re wasting time.”

“…You’re right.”

The guard’s eyes widened. “Oh Death, no-!”

Liz pulled the trigger. The gunshot echoed in the stone walls. The guard’s head hit the floor, a puddle of blood forming at the back of his head.

A second passed.

“What the hell did you just do?!” Kid yelled.

“The hell’s up with you?” Liz shot back annoyed. “I took care of the dude.”

“Take care’, you killed him!”

“Uh…” Liz gestured to the fallen man with a raised eyebrow.

The guard’s body was still moving. His face had gone slack, his eyes were glazed, and a thin trail blood came from the spot Liz had pulled the trigger. It was a surface wound, a manifestation at the sheer damage that had been inflicted at the man’s soul. Kid could see it, occupying the same physical space as before but now it was static, as if it had been encased in ice.

The man’s nails scratched at the rock floor in a twitching fashion, a phenomenon Kid knew would only get worse. Though he had never come face to face with a human corpse, he had heard enough tales of their restless motions, seemingly meaningless but with a strange determination to them… Just like those who generated that infernal constant knocking in the background.

“You know what I mean.” Kid looked away. The sight was wrong… “He’s wasn’t…”
Lis shrugged. “Whatever he wasn’t don’t matter now.” She stood up and headed to the exit. When she noticed Kid was rooted to his spot, she let out an aggravated groan and turned around. “What, you feeling sorry for that sack of shit?”

Kid held back a snort. It wasn’t empathy. Kid held no false sense of sympathy for the man. He couldn’t care less about his existence, or what would happen to him afterwards. He had standards to live up to.

Yet…

Kid’s thoughts were broken when something grabbed his ankle. His soul pulsed and the boy found himself torn; the conscious part of him wanted to recoil from the touch yet he still had the urge to stay still, even reach down and-

Whatever it was Kid’s unconscious wanted him to do, he would never found out. A loud gunshot rang out and the guard’s corpse, the one who had grabbed Kid’s ankle, let go and collapsed to the floor once more, now with an extra hole in his head.

“Got him again for good measure,” Liz said, pointing a smoking Patty at the corpse's head, just in case. “Now let’s go before he tries to cuddle you again.”

Kid did as told, dazed after the encounter. He followed the sisters, until Liz turned to him and asked, “so, what was up with you before? You sad? Scared?”

No, Kid definitely didn’t feel any of the above.

“Frustrated would be a more appropriate term,” Kid lied. He had no idea what he felt and was making it up on the spot. “Maybe he had other uses we’ll never know about,” Kid rationalised, though he wasn’t sure if it was aimed at the girl or himself. “Who knows, worst case scenario he could have kept him as hostage. Point being, that was wasteful.”

For a moment, Liz’s face was blank. Eventually, her features broke into a cruel smile. “Heh. Good to see I’m not dealing with a softie.”

Kid ignored Liz and glanced behind him just before the room went out of sight.

The corpse wasn’t moving.

Chapter End Notes

In some not-so-good-news, PhD applications are the Devil and are kicking my ass and taking up all my time, along with a couple of other stuff. Unfortunately, This means that other than stuff I’ve already prepared (i.e. chapters in this story) I may have to delay all future updates, including my resbang fic, until I get my shit together which will happen sooner than later. Apologies, and thank you everyone for your kind feedback.
A boy was standing in Arachne’s way, and for a moment she thought he was Kid. The boy’s thin frame, pale skin and black hair suggested so, though most of his features were obscured by the smoke and rubble.

Ignoring the screams of the Academy’s members as Giriko literally mowed through them, ignoring the pale drained bodies at Mosquito’s feet, ignoring her victim’s screams as spiders tore their flesh and injected them with poison, Arachne had follow after the boy through narrow winding hallways. Mosquito and Giriko made sure to follow close after her, taking out any unfortunate Academy members that crossed their path.

Part of Arachne was yelling at her that she was being deceived, that the boy merely looked like Kid, that she was seeing ghosts, that she had seen his head cut off. The other part told her that there were beings that could survive decapitation, that she still had no idea of Kid’s heritage and maybe, just maybe, through some miracle Kid was still alive.

Finally the boy entered a wide underground arena, structured like a subterranean colosseum. Flames lit up the sides of the central arena, briefly illuminating the boy’s featured as he ran through the entrance and stopped at its centre.

Arachne paused as well, though for another reason. From the brief glimpse she had caught of the boy as he ran through the narrow entrance of the arena, she noticed how he was taller, his hair was styled differently, how…

The boy was not Kid. Just her mind playing tricks on her.

Squashing memories of a limp body and so much blood, Arachne looked at the mysterious boy again. He had remained still at the centre of the arena as if he was waiting for someone. Her?

Her shoes clicked as she walked through the cobblestone and into the arena. The closer she got, the more differences she could spot between Kid and this impostor. Though just as thin, he was taller than Kid -her son’s stature was a constant source of maternal worry, since his frame never seemed to fill out and any height he gained only made him look thinner. His hair was longer and slicked back. His eyes were blue instead of yellow -a trait that had Arachne suspect that Kid was a member of the Immortal Werewolf clan, an inquiry that like all others had gone nowhere. Most importantly, this boy’s features were settled into a peculiar scowl; his mouth in particular resembled a ‘Λ’.

“You did follow me,” the boy said, his voice slightly higher than Kid’s, which had dropped a couple of years ago -and he had been so proud of it as if he’d done it himself, which Arachne had found endlessly amusing.
Arachne scowled at the boy, feeling partially mad at him for tricking her. She had thought he was Kid when he clearly wasn’t. The boy wasn’t to be blamed at all, it was Arachne’s fault-

She quickly discarded such thoughts as a symptom of guilt. She had to keep her mind clear. Now was not the time. Never mind the boy; Arachne had a revenge to extract.

“Get out of my way child, before you end up as food for my spiders.” She wasn’t planning on leaving any survivors, but maybe she should. The Weapons, the younger ones that hadn’t been poisoned with the Academy’s lies, may find a home in Arachnophobia.

Arachne waited, but the boy said nothing more or made any move. Disappointed, she turned her back on him and walked towards the exit of the arena. Initially, Arachne’s plan had been to slaughter each and every one here, everyone complicit with the murder. But maybe if it was just one that she would let go, let it be the one that looked like him-

A shrill sound came from behind her and Arachne jumped out of the way as something black and disk-shaped crashed where she’d been, cracking the ground as if it was a cannonball.

Arachne turned on the boy, venom dripping from her lips. “You dare attack me?!” Boy or not, Arachne would not tolerate any attempts on her life, not from these cursed Academy members-!

“This is annoying,” the boy said, lowering his hand as he gave Arachne a bored look. “Stand down, Witch.”

Why that brat!

“And I would ask you to kindly lay down and let my spiders devour you,” she growled, gathering her power for an attack. “Or run, but then I wouldn’t get the pleasure of slaughtering you.”

“Just as my Master said…” the boy said with a click of his tongue. “ruthless and savage like an animal.”

Arachne frowned. Why was that boy so calm? Did he not know who she was? Was he overcome with that youthful arrogance that made one feel like they could take the world? “Your deluded so-called Master is free to think what they want. In the end, they’ll still be devoured, just like the rest of the Academy.”

The boy’s already peculiar scowl intensified. “The Academy? Don’t compare my Master to that a pathetic bunch-!”

That gave Arachne pause. If the boy wasn’t with the Academy, what was he doing here? Who was he working with? No member of Arachnophobia would dare talk to her like that, and since the boy had attacked her it made her think that he didn’t see himself as her ally anyways. So, just who was he working with?

“If you’re a rogue Weapon,” Arachne began, taking a stab in the dark based on the boy’s attack, “then you should not have made Arachnophobia your enemy-”

“There she is!” came a yell from the other side of the arena as an Academy Meister-Weapon duo charged at her with a battle cry. Arachne would have found their little attack cute was she not already dealing with an unknown-

The boy jumped, rising high in the air, higher than any human could. His frame doubled back more than any spine would allow without breaking. Cloth and skin came apart like an unravelling sweater, revealing a glowing orb in the middle, charging-
Arachne narrowed her eyes at the ensuing blast, the boy’s midsection acting like a cannon and sending the glowing orb through the Meister’s and Weapon’s frames, tearing them apart.

The boy gracefully landed and looked at what remained of the humans dispassionately. “Rude,” he turned to Arachne. “You have no idea what I am.”

“You’re not a Weapon,” Arachne stated. Yes, his abilities matched a Weapon, but not one of her Creations. There were very few beings who could change a human soul like she had done; none were friendly to her, not after what she’d done to Death and Asura.

The boy nodded. “My name is Gopher.”

“Milady!” Mosquito yelled as he and Giriko came rushing through the entrance. “We came as soon as we heard the attack!” the manservant paused as he looked at the two corpses, the damaged area next to Arachne, then at Gopher.

“Mosquito, Giriko, just in time.” Arachne scoffed and turned to her two lackeys. “A little rat thinks he can stand up to me.” In the end, whatever had created the boy was interfering with her revenge, and such an act was unforgivable.

Mosquito stepped forwards. “Milady. Giriko and I are more than capable of taking care of this brat.”

“Hell yeah! You go ahead and show the rest of the Academy folks why they don’t mess for Arachnophobia.” For a brief second, his usual arrogant expression turned sober. “Take revenge for the kid.”

Arachne couldn't help but smile. How thoughtful of them.

Covering her face with her fan, Arachne walked past them and headed for the entrance.

“I won’t let you-ugh!” Gopher screamed as a massive hand swatted his frame like a fly faced with a flyswatter, sending him crashing against the walls of the colosseum.

Coughing up blood and with rubble falling off him, Gopher looked up, eyes wide.

Mosquito’s tiny frame had been replaced by a giant one, made up huge spherical torso with giant muscular arms and ludicrously tiny legs.

“This!” Mosquito announced, his shrill voice in odds with his enlarged body, “is my form from 100 years ago!” He lunged at Gopher with gorilla-like agility, jumping up and bringing his hands together for a hammer punch.

With no second to spare Gopher dodged to the side, escaping Mosquito’s destructive punch but being picked up by the resulting shockwave and sent flying through another wall. The rubble gave way and a haggard Gopher emerged from them. His clothes were torn caked with debris, and the boy coughed up dust.

Gopher lifted his head up to see Giriko, his chainsaw glinting in the faint light and Mosquito, who cast a shadow over them. The boy’s features settled into a hard scowl.

Giriko gave the boy a harsh laugh as his chains surrounding his body sped up with an ear-piercing whine. “Think you can last more than a second, brat?”
Kid was with Elizabeth and Patricia, making a very slow but steady progress through the Academy’s dungeons. The trio were making their way through the catacombs. There were no lights, plunging the narrow hallways into darkness.

"Can’t see shit," Kid heard Liz mutter. "How are we gonna find our way out?"

"We just stick to one side of the wall and follow it through. We're bound to find an exit eventually," Kid said. "That's the sure-fire way of exiting a maze."

"One problem with your plan dude. Me and Patty need to eat, and Patty’s hungry," Liz said. Next to her Patty let out a moan clutching her stomach.

“It’s Patty and I,” Kid corrected her, earning him a muttered curse from the eldest sister. "And you’ll be fine. People can make it up to three days without food—""

"*Me and Patty,*" Liz insisted, "*are not super healthy right now if you've noticed. Besides, you don’t like you’re any better, kiddo.*" Her voice adopted a tone that was ambivalent in its sincerity. “Like, hypothetically speaking, what’s stopping us from offing you here and now? Your skinny arms don’t look like they’d be useful in a fight—"

"You’re free because of me. If you don't want my help you’re free to wander off on your own." Kid looked back on Liz. “And if you attack me I will attack back.”

Liz huffed. "Brat..."

Kid rolled his eyes. “Less talking, more walking.”

“Are you really Arachne’s kid?” Patty asked.

“Yes.”

Liz whistled. “So uh, if we get you to your mom, will we get a sweet reward or something?”

Kid didn’t answer, even as Liz kept pestering him with questions. He wanted nothing more than to leave this place. Yet, his mother was still their prisoner -unless they had… no Kid refused to entertain the thought until he saw the body himself. He had to get her out along with Mosquito and Giriko. Only then would they have a chance at escaping from the Academy in one piece and regroup at Arachnophobia.

Kid closed his eyes and focused on his Soul Perception. Dozens of blurry souls came into focus, including the souls of the two sisters next to him. Further from that, he could detect many other souls, humans probably and then…

Kid almost choked on nothing. He could have sworn he had-

No, that was unmistakably Arachne’s soul, joined by two others, almost certainly Giriko and Mosquito, travelling further into the Academy’s building. No other souls were around them, meaning they weren’t escorted… Had they found a way to escape? To break free?

Kid was so focused on those three souls that he missed a foreign one until it was right around the corner.

“Wait,” Kid called out and went still. Liz and Patty frowned but followed his lead. “There is someone…"
A man walked into their line of sight. He was tall and slender, wearing loose clothes and clutching a heavy tome.

“Who are you?” Kid asked. “Are you with the Academy?”

The man clicked his tongue in annoyance. “So here you are…”

Kid took a step back. He could see the man’s soul, large, powerful and... irregular. It was as if it was stitched together, pages upon pages compressed together to form a solid mass...

The unknown man took a step forward and looked at Kid as if he was seizing him up. Kid found himself taking another involuntary step back. “You don’t look like much. Nevertheless, my maker ordered me to get you…”

“Did they?” Kid said with fake confidence, taking a careful look of his surroundings. The only way to escape was to run back from where they came, but that lead to a maze, which lead to that seemingly bottomless cave… “And who are they exactly?”

The man smirked. “You’ll see.”

“Who are you?” Liz asked. Her expressionmorphed into a sly grin, and her voice dropped an octave, oozing with confidence. “I like to know the names of people before I split their head open.”

“Noah.”

Well that was anticlimactic, Kid thought. He didn’t know the name Noah from anywhere, Mother had never mentioned knowing anyone by that name, and neither had Mosquito and Giriko, to Kid’s knowledge.

Kid took in a sharp breath and tensed. Noah was probably another member of the Academy or some other faction associated with them. In any case, he was one person and they were three of them, so they should be able to overpower him. Still, his strange soul worried him.

“Hi Noah,” Liz said, pointing Patty’s Weapon form and pointing it at him. “And bye.”

Liz pulled the trigger and her bullet hit the man square in the face, causing him to stagger. Liz’s smirk widened, and Kid expected Noah to collapse with a hole on his forehead.

That did not happen. In fact, the exact opposite happened. Noah did stagger, but he immediately regained his footing. His forehead was wound-less, with only a smudge where the sisters’ bullet hit.

“Run!” Kid yelled and took off in a random direction. He heard two pairs of footsteps behind him so the sisters were following him. His tactic wasn’t dignified or proper, but to hell with that. Kid had a family to reunite with.

“Where do you think you’re going?”

Kid and the sisters turned around a corner to find Noah right in front of them.

“How-?”

Noah grabbed Kid by the throat, holding him tight Kid as choked and clawed at the man’s hands.

Liz shot at Noah with Patty, causing him to drop Kid and the three scrambled and ran away from him again.
Kid rubbed his throat. Noah’s hold hadn’t really hurt per se, but it sent his skin crawling.

“This asshole one of yours?!” Liz yelled as she dragged Kid through another set of narrow hallways.

Kid coughed and scowled. Goddammit, he had just made it out of a dammed coffin and he already had to deal with another maniac. “I don’t know-!”

They turned another corner and Noah was standing before them again.

“Let’s try this one more time,” Noah dispassionately said as he grabbed Kid by the throat again.

Kid trashed but Noah squeezed, and he couldn’t breathe, his windpipe crushed under the man’s fingers. Kid’s body felt numb again, the same numbness that had washed over him while dangling over the coffins. Images flashed in his eyes, stills of a colossal wave of yellow -no it was red-wavelength crashing at them, that become more vivid the more the strange numbness spread over their- his body.

Noah let him go and Kid collapsed to his knees. He clutched his chest. Something was going wrong,-no, right- he could breathe but he didn’t have to-

Next to him, Liz looked at the man wide-eyed, pointing Patty at him but not shooting.

As moments passed and the only movement between the four was Kid’s haggard breathing, Liz finally cursed and reached out to him. “What are you waiting for, let’s go-”

It was his only option as a hastily-made Fragment, a body not his own-

Liz’s hand had barely come in contact with Kid’s skin when she recoiled, looking as if she had been stuck with a sledgehammer. She tripped on nothing and falling backwards. Patty transformed back and she collapsed, grasping her stomach.

Someone grabbed Kid’s hair, fingers digging painfully at his scalp. “Let’s go,” came Noah’s voice and through his blurred vision Kid made out a portal, one made of archaic magic he didn’t recognise.

Desperate, Kid grabbed at the collapsed Liz and Patty as they disappeared through the void. He could hear the sisters’ disjointed thoughts, he could feel her despair as she-

Her head was held underwater.

Somewhere close to her, she could hear Patty’s screams. They were ferocious and animalistic; Liz hadn’t heard her younger sister so unrestrained in her life.

Liz kept screaming in rage and despair. Water filled her lungs. Her mind was going blurry. She couldn’t breathe and every time she tired, only pure pain would register as her lungs filled with liquid.

No, she couldn’t die, they were the Thompson sisters-!

Chapter End Notes

the kids ain't alright
Comments are appreciated.
Kid awoke in darkness. Again.

For a moment, he thought he’d been recaptured by that Noah stranger and thrown back into the stone coffins of the Academy.

However, such a guess was quickly discarded when Kid realised that though it felt like he had been laying on something solid, there was no ground below him. Or a ceiling. Or any visible walls in general. Just darkness.

Slowly and with some hesitance in case the darkness below him decided not to be so solid anymore, Kid rose up and awkwardly got to his feet. A positive sign really, because that meant he could still walk. To where exactly he didn’t know, but at least he had the option to.

So far so good.

Kid brought a hand up to rub his eyes, only to feel something brush past his fingertips. Blinking, he realised that though he was still in a lightless area, there was something else here with him, a black substance that floated around him. It was softer than any other material Kid had encountered, breaking apart and reforming whenever his fingers passed through it. At the same time though, it was present in worryingly high concentrations and Kid coughed; whenever he tried to breathe he would inhale some of the black substance.

Kid took a step forward, only for his leg to step on an invisible surface that curved upwards, causing him to lose his balance and tumble down, landing in an awkward heap on the ‘floor’ which he now realised was curved. Around him the black substance dispersed before regathering like a cloud of dust, eliciting another round of coughs.

With a grumble, Kid got up again, and this time carefully spread his hands around him until they brushed up a solid… wall, for lack of a better term. Frowning, Kid traced his hands across the boundaries, following them as they curved inwards above and below him into singular points; one was right under Kid’s feet while the other was above him.

A bubble, Kid realised. Or an egg. Or… something spherical-based.

His hands brushed up an irregularity in the boundary, a chipped surface, a crack. Then another one as his hands travelled downwards. And another. Three of them in total. Three cracks that, upon closer inspection, ran halfway across to the bubble’s circumference, parallel to each other. Each crack ran perfectly straight, encircling half the bubble and letting off a small ray of… something, something that behaved like light but occasionally sucked out of the black substance Kid was
Kid tried to peer through the cracks to see what was on the other side; however they were too narrow for him to be able to make out anything other than the black substance flowing out.

Kid pounded on the barrier, to the area where the cracks were. Nothing happened.

He pounded against it again. The barrier remained unchanged. The only thing that had changed was that his knuckles were now hurting.

With a shuddered sigh, Kid let himself slide down on the curved floor and buried his head in his hands.

His Soul Perception didn’t work. It wasn’t as if it came up blank; Kid couldn’t activate it in the first place, which only worried him more since using his Soul Perception had been the easiest thing for him, being able to do so before he had even taken his first step.

He just… he just wanted to get home. He wanted to be away from the Academy, away from whatever strange prison this was and back in his room at Baba Yaga, which was small but tidy and above all, safe.

Well, safest, considering what had happened. And mother was there, and despite any rumours Kid had heard about her growing up, she was the person that had cared for him. The one that had tried to protect him, despite what had happened to him at the Academy.

In good news, at least it looked like mother had escaped, from what Kid had sensed with his Soul Perception. Putting aside the how, she was hopefully looking out for Kid, even if she thought he was dead. Perhaps Kid would have to tough it out for a while, but eventually mother would find him and this whole mess would be over.

Spirits slightly renewed, Kid laid back and closed his eyes. He tried to take a reassuring breath but only ended up choking on the black substance.

Annoyed, he cracked an eye open, and paused. Was it his imagination or was there more of the black substance around him than before?

At the same time, he noticed black spots across his arms; after a hasty inspection, he realised that it wasn’t just his arms, but his entire body, and that the spots moved. Not only that, but his clothes had been replaced by a cloak made of the black substance as it coalesced into an ethereal resemblance of cloth.

Dread rising, Kid concentrated on his palm, where he realised that what he was seeing weren’t exactly spots. Dark particles would emerge, gather and peel off his skin before being replaced by a new emergent set.

The black choking substance was coming from him.

Kid awoke again, this time to find himself placed on a chair in a softly-lit room. The air was chilly, far colder than the musky atmosphere of the dungeons, but he could breathe normally.

Next to him, Liz had curved up into a protective shivering ball, somehow incorporating Patty as well. The older sister was groaning about how her whole body felt stiff and was hacking madly, like a person on their deathbed. Noah was nowhere in sight.
Kid brought a hand around himself when he realised his breath was coming foggy. The cold didn’t bother him as much as it should. He could feel the heat leaving his body but it didn’t induce a shiver or any other physiological response, just the knowledge that heat was leaving him.

Well. At least he wasn’t choking on… whatever that black substance was in what had hopefully been just a surreal nightmare.

Looking around, Kid realised he was in some sort of adobe. The walls were made up of a black rock with strange serrated incisions, as if it had been dug up and deposited in huge slabs of stone. A thick candle placed on a repression in the adobe bathed the room in a soft light. There were a few decorations and bas-reliefs on the walls, most depicting monstrous beings which one may have found unnerving but made Kid annoyed because of their lack of symmetry. There was a window made up of old frozen wood and looked stuck in place. The sparse furniture that was in the room was relatively recent, contrasting the ancient feel of the building. A Victorian era armchair was placed next to an antique coffee table where a few books in languages Kid didn’t know he could understand lay in a small pile. They were academic in nature, mostly concerning biology and cosmology, besides a few that were occult in origins.

"After all this time, I finally found you..."

Kid looked up in terror to see a being which wasn’t a human despite their humanoid shape. Its appearance was obscured by heavy robes in muted colours and a decorated ritualistic mask. At the end of his sleeves, where hands ought to be, were just vast collections of thin, sharp knives.

Kid instinctively felt that there was something else, an inherent strangeness about this being, not of this Earth. The unconventional appearance was just the tip of an iceberg of enormous size and power. His eyes watered.

"...This is strange. I've never seen your soul like this..." The being tilted its head, its mask pointing at Kid’s direction. "Hello, old friend."

"W-what?" was the only response Kid could formulate. In his confusion he didn’t comprehend the being’s greeting in full, too concerned with the icy yet familiar feeling in his chest.

The being only tilted its head further. "Very peculiar indeed."

"Who the fuck-" Liz trembling voice caused the two to focus on her. The older teen scowled, clutching her sister closer. She gulped when the unknown being turned its mask to face her. “That bastard, where is he-!?"

"Be silent for a second, human. I have more important guests to tend to."

Its gaze refocused on Kid. Kid who, by now having regained some of his mobility, scuttled back to the end of the room, his back pressed against the black stone.

"W-Who are you?"

"You don’t remember me?"

Kid slowly shook his head. He also wondered if removing the shutters from the window and then jumping off it would be a valid way to escape. Just where had they ended up?

"Curiouser and curiouser," the figure muttered as it leaned in closer. As if it finally realised Kid’s growing apprehension, the figure stood back. "I am Eibon."
Kid backed up against the wall as much as it allowed. He knew the rumours about Eibon, about a being pretending to be of this Earth, with vast amounts of knowledge, forbidden or worse. Eibon had disregarded taboos, diving into fields of questionable sanity and only enriching them with complicated and powerful designs. Kid's mother was a genius, but Eibon was on another league entirely.

Problem was, just as Kid was vaguely aware that Arachne had done questionable things, such was Eibon's apparent disregard for ethics.

Which one again brought up the question of why the hell was Kid in Eibon’s doorstep. Was Eibon just searching for guinea pigs and they had been his unlucky catch? Had he been looking for Kid specifically, perhaps because of his relation to Arachne? Each answer Kid would come up with was more horrifying than the last.

"Where are we?" Liz spoke up. She scowled when Eibon didn’t turn to face her, keeping his mask pointed at Kid's direction.

"What do you want with us?" Kid asked, trying his best in keeping his voice even with moderate success.

"Want? Well, I suppose I did abduct you…" Eibon let out a short laugh.

“You sent that maniac after us,” Kid breathlessly said. It made sense for Eibon of all beings to be in charge of someone like….

“Noah?” Eibon let out a sigh. “You are right. I recently discovered your predicament, but I had no one to turn to. After your supposed demise I did not have any allies left besides for my constructs.”

Blinking at the utter nonsense Eibon was saying, Kid kept his back pressed against the wall, wishing it would swallow him whole.

Eibon’s frame shook in what a madman might describe as reserved laughter. “Heh. You keep finding yourself in trouble, old friend.”

"You two know each other?!” Liz asked. Next to her Patty shivered from the cold.

"No," Kid immediately responded.

Eibon slightly slumped his shoulders -or at least the part of his body that looked like shoulders. "Do you truly not remember the times we spend together a millennium ago?"

"…I'm fourteen," Kid blankly stated, starting to doubt the being's sanity.

"No, you're not.” Eibon leaned in close again forcing Kid to reattempt merging with the wall. “Though I suppose you are, in one respect."

Kid blinked in confusion. "Where are we?" He asked, trying to change the subject.

"Tell me," Eibon said, disregarding the teen's question. "What do you think your name is?"

The boy was conflicted for a second whether to answer with the name mother had technically given him or the one he actually used. He settled for the latter. “Kid.”

"I see..." Eibon muttered as he leaned in closer. The being was uncomfortably intruding upon Kid's personal space but he didn't dare speak up while that eyeless gaze was upon him.
"Tell me, Kid..." Eibon leaned slightly out, giving Kid a miniscule reason to relax.

“What do you think you are?”

The boy was about to respond with 'human' but the words died in his mouth. He stared back at Eibon while bringing a hand to his neck. He could feel the rough still unhealed skin at the base of it. The fatal blow which proved to be anything but.

_A desperate attempt- a last ditch resort-

"I don't know."

Chapter End Notes

Comments are appreciated.
WitchHunty (BRUXA, BLVCK CEILING Remix)

Chapter Notes

Forgot what day it was yesterday, sorry for the delay, woops

Link to playlist: https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PL5NETqX6iwDY07_D49mrOgqtZ5YSSCdFS

Don't forget to listen to the songs!

Arachne turned around the corner only to see another empty hallway. With a sigh she covered the lower half of her face with her fan and let out a sigh.

Next to her, Giriko, red in the face, teeth gritted, and shoulders hunched, was having a very different reaction to the vacant hallway.

“I swear I saw that brat go that way!” the Weapon yelled, his chains lashing out and leaving deep cracks in the stone. “Where’d he go-?!”

Arachne tuned out Giriko’s enraged rambles and used her free hand to rub her temple.

They had been wondering around hallways for what felt like the better part of the hour. After Arachne’s encountered with that strange Gopher boy, the Witch had left him with Giriko and Mosquito. She ventured out on her own to wreak more destruction to the Academy while also trying to locate their Archives. Not only would she discover future plans of the Academy, obscure texts and maybe even a forbidden spell or two, Arachne could also find the location of what remained of…

Suddenly, Giriko’s frenzied remarks became extremely irritating. “Giriko, enough-”

“I had him!” Giriko continued glaring at the empty hallway as if he expected Gopher to pop up from the ground. “I had him good and then he went up and disappeared-!”

“I said enough.” Arachne cut him off with a glacial tone and Giriko froze in place. “We don’t have time to be chasing ghosts.”

If Giriko realised the unintentionally unfortunate phrasing behind Arachne’s words, he didn’t show, setting for sheepishly scratching his head. “Sorry boss.”

Arachne turned away and walked back from where they came from, heading for the main area of the Academy’s HQ. Perhaps there she would be able to capture a survivor or two and then torture the information out of them.

Someone would have to know. For an institution created by Death, they would have to know, they would have to have special methods of dealing with corpses-

…A corpse. Was that truly all that was left of Kid now?

No. No, Arachne had defeated Death. She had ended the end of Life itself, still evident in how souls
would linger on this realm. Perhaps even Kid’s-

“Milady.”

Without quite realising how or when, Mosquito was in standing in front of her, hat removed in a bow. Arachne stopped, face still obscured by her fan and looked down at her manservant.

“I bring good news,” Mosquito continued. “Thanks to our efforts, what is left of our captured forces has been freed and is currently contesting control of their prison area in the upper parts of the dungeons. I believe we now hold a majority control there, as well as part of the bottom floor. Radio communications with our forces outside the Academy were successful and we are also awaiting reinforcements from them within the hour.”

Arachne nodded at the information. So far so good. Soon they would completely take over the Academy. Once they did so Arachne would scour the area, extract what was needed and then burn this cursed place to the ground.


Arachne clutched her fan. A quick death would be too pleasant for the man. As she had told him before, Arachne would make him beg for his shattered master’s non-existent mercy.

Despite his pause, Mosquito bowed deeper. “Of course, milady, though I admit I was planning on sucking the man dry myself.”

“Take a turn, pipsqueak,” Giriko mumbled behind Arachne.

“For now, milady, let me escort you to the main entrance. Our forces have barricaded it to prevent anyone from escaping.”

Arachne couldn’t help but smirk. Smart and deadly. Her minions really did go above and beyond sometimes. This instance was more appreciated than the rest.

The trio walked a different set of hallways, equally lifeless as the others. Occasional they would pass by corpses, their fresh blood coating the floor slick, their bodies twitching in absence of death.

It was strange; Arachne found her eyes straying off the corpses, where otherwise she would just stare with dispassionate interest.

After a few minutes of walking through lifeless hallways, Giriko let out a suffering groan. “Come on, how long till-?”

“Arachne!”

Arachne paused and took a step back just as a scythe’s tip embedded itself in the wall where her head was moments ago.

Ignoring Mosquito’s and Giriko’s cries, Arachne calmly turned to see her attacker as the scythe was withdrawn.

A young girl, somewhere around Kid’s age, was standing on the other side of a collapsed wall. Her fingers were tightly clutching her scythe, her face filled with scratches while her clothes were torn, revealing more injuries.
Giriko lunged at the girl, chains whirling. “You little bitch-!”

The girl jumped back at Giriko’s chains but one of their tips caught her shoulder. She let out a cry of pain at the deep cut. Her shoulders trembled but she never let go of her scythe.

“Maka!” came a metallic voice from the scythe as a reflection a pale boy appeared on its blade. As, so this girl was a Meister. Not a very bright one, though.

“Let me handle this, you brute!” Pushing a fuming Giriko aside, Mosquito stepped over the rubble as Maka pressed her back on the opposite wall, her expression caught somewhere between utter terror and indignant fury.

“Maka!”

Arachne took another step back as two new scythe’s blades, these one black in colour, hit the stop right in front of her and also right above Mosquito’s head, impaling his hat and causing her manservant to pause.

With an annoyed sigh, Arachne tuned to see their new intruders and froze in place, momentarily taken aback.

“Stay away from her!” The newcomer shielded the girl with his frame, blades retreating into nonexistence as he brushed away matted red air.

Spirit. One of the Deathscythes.

“Papa!” the girl let out, her voice shaky and a painful lump formed in Arachne’s throat.

“Oi,” Giriko yelled, his engine revving up again, “it’s one of you bastards-!”

“She is your daughter,” Arachne softly said and everyone went quiet. “Though I suppose the reckless attitude should have tipped me off.”

Spirit narrowed his eyes and pushed Maka to the side, away from the trio, ignoring the girl’s protests. “Back off-”

Arachne took a step forward, Giriko and Mosquito flanking her sides. Good, they had understood that now was not the time to attack yet. Spirit pushed his daughter further away, making sure to always shield her.

“She’s your only child, I assume?”

Spirit’s glare only increased in hatred.

“Spirit!” came another voice, it too familiar to Arachne. “We already can’t find Stein, don’t go disappearing… too…” The voice died off as its owner stepped into the light, eyes wide.

Marie. Another Deathscythe. Azusa was by her side, looking equally shocked as the blonde.

What a reunion this was.

“Kids!” Marie yelled as she pulled away Maka, she and her Weapon letting out a yelp as they were pushed behind Marie then finally behind Azusa, forming a three-person thick wall.

As Mosquito and Giriko stepped forward, threatening but not actually attacking, Arachne unfolded her fan again. What should she do? Order Giriko and Mosquito to attack and continue on her
revenge? Try to capture one of the Deathscythes alive and torture them for information?

Looking over to the Deathscythes, she noticed hunched shoulders, low stances and standing on one’s tiptoes. Despite their hostile expressions, their body language spoke more of a desperate defence than a future attack. It seemed they were terrified of her, as they should be. Beads of sweat ran down their foreheads as injuries and open wounds littered their bodies. Not only were they scared, they were hurt too. An excellent combination for her enemies. Any fight between them would end swiftly in Arachne’s favour, and the Deathscythes knew it.

Faintly, Arachne heard the girl’s protests, yelling for Spirit, for her ‘papa’.

“Where do you store bodies?” Arachne asked.

The Deathscythes were given pause, exchanging confused glances with each other.

“What are you trying to do?” Spirit eventually asked, him being the literal frontline on their wall of bodies.

Arachne’s frown turned into a scowl. “I asked you a question. Cooperate.”

Azusa glanced at Spirit and Marie before speaking up. “The...” she hesitated and Arachne gave her a scowl. “Storage. It is at the lowest art of the dungeons, overlooking a deep chasm. Each body is stored with their respective soul in coffins carved into the stone.”

Arachne carefully considered the information. Storing the body with its respective soul instead of putting the latter to better use? It sounded in-character for the Academy to ‘bury’ their fallen that way. It was probably done in some expectation of a revival, of a return of Death. On one hand, it was sentimental and pathetic practise.

…On the other hand, it was incredibly convenient for Arachne. If she could get access to Kid’s body and his soul… it would be called unorthodox, blasphemous, unthinkable by anyone who disguised their cowardice as rationality.

But Arachne could do it. The Witch had already defeated Death once and she would do so again.

“If,” Azusa hesitantly spoke up, breaking Arachne out of her reverie, “it’s his bod- if he’s the one you’re looking for, he should be there.” Ignoring Spirit’s and Marie’s pained looks, the Deathscythe looked at Arachne straight in the eyes. Brave, if not suicidal. “There’s a custodian doubling as a guard at the entrance. Assuming he’s still alive he could guide you to where his b- he is stored. If… If he’s gone, then there should be an archive of all coffins and their contents by the custodian’s office, stashed away in a small cavern.”

Ah, more useful information. Arachne didn’t even have to resort to physical torture.

Silence descended among them as Arachne considered what she should do with the now useless to her Deathscythes. She could easily go along with her original plan and order Mosquito and Giriko to dispose of them. That way, not only should she eliminate potential mortal enemies, but also gain three Deathscythes’ souls in her disposal, able to do with them as she pleased.

Marie cleared her throat. “We’re sorry about what happened,” she said in a low tone and Arachne felt her stomach drop. “We didn’t mean to-”

“Quiet.” Arachne’s tone could shave ice. How dare that Deathscythe apologise, as if it mattered to Arachne in any way. As if her assistance was vital, as if she was the one that had grabbed that axe, as if she was the one…
“There was nothing you could have done,” Arachne muttered in realisation.

Marie gulped but her stubborn frown remained. “Our plan-”

“Kid didn’t trust your plan,” Arachne cut her off, not bothering with the Deathscythe’s perturbed expression. “I should have expected that. I taught him well and he’s an excellent student.”

That was the gist of it in the end, wasn’t it? The Deathscythes didn’t matter. They were just pawns Arachne had used, pawns that had been willing to help her accomplish one of her goals. A goal that had ultimately failed, but the pawns had followed her words, the words of her mortal enemy. Why, Arachne didn’t particularly care about, not at this moment.

Arachne took a step back. “Mosquito, Giriko. We’re leaving.”

Her two minions gave her confused looks, but obeyed her anyways, relaxing their poses and standing behind her.

The Deathscythes appeared as confused as her minions, Spirit going so far as to drop his defensive pose completely in sheer confusion.

Barely sparing them a glance, Arachne turned around. “You have until our return to make your escape. Consider it a temporary grace period. Oh, and the front entrance is barricaded.”

When Arachne turned back, the Deathscythes and Meister-Weapon pair were already gone, their frantic steps echoing in the dark hallway.

Chapter End Notes

Comments are appreciated.
Kid’s breath came out foggy and he hugged the ratty blanket given to him closer around his frame. Behind him, Liz had huddled with her sister on one corner of the room, away from the light. The younger sibling was staring vacantly at the whole, while the older one was holding her protectively and as if she would vanish into thin air. Liz was maintaining her mask of anger with moderate success, often glaring at the wall or Kid.

With a soft clinking of metal, Eibon entered the room, carrying a silver tray with steaming drinks. Behind him was a shadow that stood in the doorway. From its frame, Kid would have to guess it was Noah; he hadn’t seen the man -or whatever he was- ever since he had arrived here, only glimpsing him in shadows and with his Soul Perception.

After Eibon’s existential-crisis-inducing question, Kid had been escorted to sit on one of the old wooden chairs. On the way he had grabbed an old woolly blanket from what looked like an old cot. Eibon had paused, and his mask was focused on Kid, but otherwise had not commented on the action. Then, with no other questions or remarks, Eibon had left, exiting the small room by a creaking wooden door that lead, as far as Kid could see, into an abyssal hallway.

Even after Eibon’s departure, Kid and the sisters had not dared exit the room. Liz and Patty had huddled in the corner whispering among themselves. As for Kid…

Well, he had spent most of his time staring at nothing and generally not moving.

Occasionally, he would use his Soul Perception, catching glimpses of Eibon’s soul, or more worryingly, Noah’s soul. Once he had spied a third, unknown soul, which only increased his dread. That meant that Eibon must have extra lackeys working for him besides Noah.

Kid had thought about trying to remove the boards from the windows and escaping from there, but his Soul Perception couldn’t detect any other souls in the vicinity. Wherever they were, it was cold and isolated.

So far, Kid’s only explanation about this messed-up situation was that he had been kidnapped by a mad being and his lackeys. A mad being that his mother had antagonised.

“Here.” Eibon offered one of the cups to Kid, who hesitantly accepted. The cup, its texture feeling like clay, was warm, and he brought it close to his chest, trying to regain some of his lost warmth.

A whiff of sweet aroma rose from the cup and Kid his tense shoulders relax on their own. He eyed the cup with suspicion.

“What’s this?” Kid asked as Eibon bent to offer a cup to Liz.
“A blend of tea,” Eibon replied in a smooth tone. “It’s supposed to have calming qualities.”

"T-thanks,” Liz muttered at the offered beverage. She gave the liquid a careful sniff before drinking a mouthful of it.

Kid looked back at the cup. He could only trust Eibon’s words that this tea had ‘calming’ qualities and not some other effect. Hell, for all Kid knew these ‘calming qualities’ could just be an outright tranquiliser.

"It’s good,” Liz said in surprise and licked her lips.

"I've had eons of practice." Eibon’s blades rustled as he faced Patty. "Also, your sister should wear something thicker. The human body is not meant to cope with such temperatures."

Liz looked over to where Patty had fallen asleep on the floor somehow, covered in a multitude of blankets. The younger Thompson was currently snoring like a car horn gone horribly wrong.

Kid, cup still in his hands, frowned. If this Eibon entity was considerate enough to worry about the two sisters, maybe Kid didn’t have that much to worry about.

But still. One of his mother’s enemies.

“Yeah,” Liz said as she eyed Patty with concern, then looked down at herself. “I’ll need to get something for myself as well.”

Eibon tilted his head. “That won’t be necessary.”

Liz’s expression briefly fell before she rolled her eyes nonchalantly. “Hey, you may have not noticed, but I’m human too, dude.”

Eibon stayed silent. His body turned from Liz to Kid, as if he was expecting something.

Liz looked about to reply with something sarcastic but cut herself off. She looked down at her greying skin and scooted closer to Patty, throwing the edges of a blanket over her.

After a quick glance at the sisters, Kid was about to ignore Eibon and turn away, but found himself frozen in place.

There was something about Eibon, something about his slumped stance, about the way he softly spoke, something about his demeanour, something familiar that caused a lump in Kid’s throat. It was like staring at a faded family photo, one so sun-bleached that the faces were gone and all that left were vague silhouettes and vaguer background details that made one’s heart ache in remembrance.

No, this didn’t make sense. Kid had never seen Eibon before.

Maybe it was the tea. Maybe Kid had been right and it had a few more things than ‘calming properties’.

“Oh dear,” Eibon said a after a few moments of silence in which Kid fought strange tears back. “This is a worse than I feared.”

“What do you want with us?” Kid asked, looking away, clutching his cup tight. He wasn’t supposed to be here, this place was disorienting, Eibon was disorienting. “Is this some trick to gain our trust?”

“Gain your trust? Why would I need to do that?”
Kid’s scowl turned into a frown. “Because I don’t know or trust you.”

“Ah, yes, that.” Eibon let out a sigh. “You seem to not remember a thing. This is… disappointing.”

Kid’s frown deepened.

Eibon let out another defeated sigh and Kid’s heart ached again. “Apologies. My words must sound like nonsense to you.”

Kid wanted to answer that statement with a resounding ‘yes’ but he couldn’t even get his throat to work properly, choking on nothing.

“But…” Eibon continued before tilting his head at Kid. “Since you are my guests, would you indulge a small request of mine?”

Kid wouldn’t exactly call himself a guest; a more accurate term to him would be hostage, prisoner, or captive… Still, what option did he have but comply?

After Kid replied with a nod Eibon exited the room, leaving the door open. Kid couldn’t help but stare at the abyssal depths beyond the room. It might have been his imagination, but something, someone was just at the precipice of the light-

Eibon emerged from the darkness with a tome and walked to the table. The door behind him was left open.

As Eibon left the tome in front of Kid, the boy couldn’t help but flinch. Was this the infamous Book of Eibon? The multitudes of paper, parchment and various stationary haphazardly poking out of it made Kid think this was just Eibon’s version of a notebook.

“It will only take a few minutes.” Somehow managing to carefully leaf through the tome-notebook despite his hands being literal blades, Eibon took out a few pages from it. “I will show you a few things. Images. Drawings. I only ask that you tell me what you know about what is depicted.”

Kid looked up at the being with a frown. Was Eibon trying to play Pictionary with him? Or was he doing the equivalent of showing a picture book to a toddler?

Despite knowing that he was dealing with a powerful and seemingly all-knowing entity beyond what his intellect could even imagine, Kid couldn’t help but feel patronised.

The first object shown to him was a glossy type of paper. On it was a moving image, as if a photograph could somehow capture video. How…?

Right. Powerful entity with unimaginable magic. These was probably one of the least weird objects in Eibon’s possession.

Ignoring Eibon’s presence over him, Kid leaned closer towards the… photograph. On it was a small blue quivering orb letting off a gentle blue light…

“That’s a soul. A typical human soul,” Kid added the last bit just in case.

Soundlessly Eibon out down another moving photograph, this one depicting a bright purple ball of light.

“A Witch’s soul,” Kid replied with a blank expression.

“No more comments?” Eibon asked after a few moments of silence.
Kid looked up at the being with a frown. “It’s just a Witch’s soul.” Was he supposed to say anything else? Perhaps have a different reaction?

Soundlessly, Eibon placed another photograph in front of Kid. Shifting his gaze to the photograph, Kid expected it to be another ordinary soul, maybe a werewolf’s or-

It was red.

The soul was red and scabby and putrid-

“That’s…” Kid’s stomach lurched and even if he knew it was a mere photograph, part of him wanted to reach out and rip it. “That’s…” Kid closed his eyes and looked away. “Another… soul.”

“You look uncomfortable.”

“It’s disgusting,” Kid immediately said, refusing to look at the photograph again. His hands were clenched, and the faint candlelight reminded him of that abomination disguised as a man, that seemingly ordinary body with the red soul Kid had torn to shreds-

“I see…” Eibon’s voice snapped Kid out of his reverie and he opened his eyes to see another thing offered to him by the being.

The next thing handed to him was an ancient but otherwise ordinary looking parchment, which Kid was initially thankful for. Hopefully he wouldn’t have to deal with any of these moving images.

Then Kid actually looked at what was depicted and blinked.

On the paper were symbols looked like they were less written and more like carved into the paper, jagged sigils that nevertheless… looked… familiar?

His notebook. The notebook back at his home. Was it Kid imagination or had he been using the very same characters?

No, he had to be seeing things. It couldn’t be-

Maybe this was some sort of magic that made Kid see those specific characters. Something like a quirky translation spell.

Eibon’s blades clinked against each other as the being towered over him.

Right. Now was not the time to have an existential crisis. Kid would allow himself to do that later.

“That’s…” Kid squinted. “These are… words?”

“You can read them out for me?”

“I know this will find you in good health,” Kid said, translating the symbols to English. “I am grateful for your warnings but I…” he choked, “I must persist on the path I’ve chosen.” His eyes felt wet. “May we meet again in better times. May…” Kid rubbed his eyes, tears definitely threatening to spill over. “May this friendship last.”

There was something more at the end of the parchment, a flower-like symbol with three lines across it and it must have been his imagination but these symbols were even written in Kid’s handwriting-

Kid looked away again and rubbed his temples. His heart beat a mile a minute, aching, while his throat constricted-
“Is there something wrong?” Eibon asked, taking the parchment away from him.

“I think…” Kid coughed and drew in sharp breaths. Breathe. He had to breathe. His skull was pounding. “I think I’m getting a migraine.”

“Oh. I apologise, I did not mean to…” Eibon trailed off. “There are only two more left if you’d be so kind.”

Still clutching his head, Kid looked down at the paper to see a drawing this time. There was an elaborate still-life drawing of a being Kid… didn’t… recognise?

The being was humanoid with a thin masculine frame. A loose red sweater hung off their skinny frame along with a baggy pair of trousers and bandages, so many bandages wrapped around their neck like a scarf…

“I… I don’t know,” was the only thing Kid could say. Though, the more he stared at the being’s face, pale skin with red eyes but otherwise characteristics that Kid was intimately familiar with, the more realised such features… “Am I seeing things, or do they look like me?”

Soundlessly, Eibon took the drawing away. Kid wanted to protest, he wanted to examine the drawing closer as there something about that being that set off all sort of red flags but kept quiet. He didn’t know if he had the luxury of protesting and didn’t want to find out.

The final image was another drawing, one that Kid initially thought was just a black splotch until his mind registered a menacing skull-

Kid reflexively leaned as far back as his chair would allow. He had seen this form before, he had glanced it at mother’s old drawings, he had heard about it in hushed whispers. It had always been accompanied by grave warnings and sighs of relief that it had been vanquished by Kid’s parent.

“That’s Death,” Kid breathlessly said, refusing to take their eyes of the image. Never before had Kid seen Death in such clarity. Their legless torso was made up of an entirely black and wispy substance with a single menacing claw-like hand extending out of it. A skull was on the top of the substance, lacking a jaw and scrunched up in a baleful scowl.

Eibon tilted his head. “…You seem scared.”

Kid glanced from Eibon to the drawing of Death. “Don’t think we’d get along.” His gaze fell again on the drawing and he couldn’t look away, chest burning. “What with Arachne being my mother, adopted or not.”

A chuckle came from the doorway. Kid glanced at it with a frown. There was definitely someone there. Noah perhaps?

“This is more serious than I thought,” Eibon let out, unperturbed by the chuckle.

Eibon’s blades where on Kid’s shoulder and he froze, feeling any wrong move would end up with him impaled.

"Listen to me carefully.” Eibon’s mask was at Kid’s eye level and the boy couldn’t look away. "You. Are. Death."

There was a long silence between them.

“…Sure,” Kid eventually said to placate the apparently insane being. Let Eibon think he was Death
if that meant Kid would live to see another day.

Eibon let go of Kid and sighed. “You don’t believe me.”

Footsteps came from the doorway but Kid kept his gaze on Eibon who, apparently driven mad by isolation or something, thought that he was the Grim Reaper, of all things. “Oh, no, I definitely do-”

“This is getting us nowhere-”

Before Kid knew what was happening he was grabbed by the collar and pulled forward as fingers unbuttoned the upper part of his shirt.

Kid thrashed in the grip but that only caused Noah to turn him around and grab his free hand. "Get your hands off me!"

“Noah-” Eibon warned.

Noah jerked his hand downwards, taking Kid’s collar with it and redirected his hand to his neck. "Why the hell do you have this?"

Kid’s scowl faltered as his fingers traced the scar around his neck, previously hidden by his collar. “What do you mean why? It’s a scar-”

Noah scoffed. "You don't scar-"

"A psychosomatic effect perhaps?” Eibon commented. “Interesting-"

Noah let go of Kid and he stumbled away, rubbing his neck and looking at the two beings with wide eyes.

Eibon took a step forwards and Kid shifted all his attention to him, backing up in a corner of the room. He glanced at Liz and Patty only to see both of them fast asleep. How the hell had they managed to sleep in a situation like this in the first place? Magic? Or maybe the tea…

“You're all insane,” Kid let out. Maybe if he screamed loud enough the sisters would wake and they could somehow hold Eibon and Noah off for a while as they ran out of the room and perhaps away from these madmen-

There was a sharp pain at his chest and Kid would have collapsed was something not holding him up. Bile rose in his throat along with a distinctive metallic substance.

Looking down, Kid’s blood matted his shirt as something that looked like a sword made of parchment had dug right in and through his chest.

Chapter End Notes

Comments are appreciated.
Delirium (CHVRN)

Chapter Notes

Link to playlist: https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PL5NETqX6IwDY07_D49mrOgqtZ5YSSCdFS

Don't forget to listen to the songs!

Looking down, Kid’s blood matted his shirt as something that looked like a sword made of parchment had dug right in and through his chest.

Impaled, Kid realised. He had been impaled, run through-

Noah’s hands nonchalantly holding the parchment sword from where it extended out of Kid’s chest.

Eibon’s blades came down with a sharp sound and broke the sword into a thousand pieces at the entity turned to Noah. “What do you think you’re doing-?”

Noah lunged at Kid, dodging a swipe by Eibon’s blades. "Do you want him to realise what he is or not?"

Kid coughed blood and he couldn’t breathe as Noah grabbed him by the collar. On one hand the hold was choking Kid, but on the other hand Noah’s hold was the only thing that prevented Kid from falling off the chair, limbs feeling heavy and unresponsive as his chest burned.

"What's the matter, Kid?" Noah spat out the last word. "You're still alive. Or as alive as you can be. Like you were after your head was cut off." Something wet was running down Kid’s neck as well now, coating his clothes in the same abhorrent red substance. "Now that's not something humans can do, right? I'd have it pegged as more of a Grim Reaper attribute-"

"I’ll get you for this," Kid choked out at Noah, glaring at the grinning man.

As if hit with electricity, Noah’s hands let go of Kid and he fell back into the chair. While Eibon watched Noah depart into that abyssal hallway, Kid’s frame slumped forward, almost doubling over.

Kid was about to fall of the chair before Eibon’s blade held Kid by the shoulder. Somehow managing to not even scratch Kid, Eibon carefully positioned him on the back of the chair, such so that Kid wasn’t in any danger of falling off. Still, his breathing came up with blood, his body felt numb and a haze spread over his mind and vision.

“I deeply apologise for this. I should have kept Noah on a tighter leash but that would render it ineffective…” came Eibon’s even voice. It no longer had that unearthly echo from before.

Slowly regaining control of his limbs, Kid brought one trembling hand up and began undoing his shirt to where a remnant of Noah’s blade was. The wound was still bleeding, which meant Kid hadn’t healed it which meant Noah was wrong, which meant Kid wasn’t the freaking Grim Reapere-
Finally, Kid unbuttoned the top part, revealing a very prominent wound where the fragment of the blade stuck out of him.

“You should remove that.” A couple of Eibon’s blades reached out to Kid but he pushed himself against the chair, letting out a groan as the gesture irritated his wound.

Instead, Kid brought his hands up to the blade, unsteady or not. He gasped the blade and immediately let go as a wave of pain washed over him. He tried to grab it again, but his trembling hands only pushed the blade further in or moved it around, worsening his injury.

Still unable to breathe properly, Kid let his head roll back as his hands dropped at his sides. Time, he needed time, time to process that he had been run through and was still very much alive-

“Oh dear,” came Eibon’s voice with a slight buzz. “Here, allow me…"

Before Kid could protest, the blade quickly came off him with a slick sickening noise, like removing the world’s goriest band-aid. He let out a sharp cry and gained enough strength to double over again, clutching his burning chest. Blood pooled in his palm and dripped over his fingers. Damnit Eibon, this was what happened when the object causing the stab wound was removed. Now he wasn’t going to have a slow painful death but a very quick and bloody one…

“You’ll be fine.” Once again, Eibon slowly helped Kid get back and rest back on the chair. “Look.”

With a groan, Kid looked down at his wound, having retracted his hands and froze.

The wound was healing. Before Kid’s very eyes the jagged skin folded over itself even as blood freely poured out of it. Like wet sheets of paper sticking together, the skin layers melded with each other, until the wound was gone.

No. No, this couldn’t be, no, no, no-

"I do apologise-"

"I want to leave,” Kid cut him off, taking a deep breath -he could breathe again, as if he hadn’t just thrown up blood moments ago- eyes still fixated on the smooth skin that was once a gory wound. “I want to get out of here.”

He got up from his chair, his limbs were functioning perfectly again, though the gaze in his mind persisted. Good so that meant that something was still damaged, that Kid hadn’t just completely healed what should have killed a normal person within minutes-

"There is nothing but ice outside these walls-"

"I don't care!” Kid cut him off, squashing out any worries about yelling at goddamn Eibon because he had just been impaled and hadn’t even gotten a scar from it. "I'm not spending another minute with this-this nonsense!" Refusing to let Eibon off his sight, Kid backed away to the boarded window, close to where the sisters were. "Liz, Patty we're leaving-!"

“They’ll be asleep for a while,” Eibon said, having stayed in place ever since Kid got up. “I thought we shouldn’t be disturbed.”

Confused, Kid risked a glance at the sisters. Patty was still huddled under a mountain of blankets as they moved in rhythms with her snores. Liz was next to her sisters, appearing equally dead to the word. She had tried to huddle over a few edges on the multitudes of Patty’s blankets; most of them had fallen off her, yet she didn’t show any sign of acknowledging the cold.
Following a soft clinking noise, Kid turned his head to see Eibon closer to him.

“What do you want?” Kid hissed at the entity, pressing himself further back against the wall. “Are you going to stop me?”

“No. Though I’d prefer you stay and listen, I cannot force you to do anything.” Taking another step forward, Eibon inclined his head towards Kid. “But, allow me a word and a gift before you leave.”

Kid eyed Eibon suspiciously. No doubt the ‘word’ and ‘gift’ would be thinly veiled attempts at selling Kid the absolutely insane idea that he was the Grim Reaper, of all things. Even… even if he had healed the wound there were many other beings that had regenerative powers, like the Immortal clans for example, so maybe Kid was one of them even if any such tests had turned out to be negative-

"First, my gift." Reaching into his robes, Eibon eventually took out a pale orb, roughly smaller than Kid’s fist. It was made up of a cloudy crystalline material and glowed with a faint white colour.

Kid’s eyes narrowed further at the reveal of the orb. “What's that?”

"My essence, crystallised.” He turned the orb with his blades, like a jeweller presenting a finely carved diamond. "Knowledge. Specifically, knowledge about you.”

Ah, so Eibon wasn’t even trying to be subtle about convincing Kid that he was Death. Truly, he was dealing with a madman.

Eibon let out a sigh, as if he could hear Kid’s thoughts. For all Kid knew, the entity might as well be able to. “It saddens me that will not believe me. But few can doubt reality once they’ve experienced it. So here.”

Bending with surprising elasticity, Eibon’s blades presented the orb to Kid. Not seeing any other alternative course of action, Kid hesitantly got the orb. It was cold to the touch, yet strangely comfortable. Faint trickles of black reached out of its depths from where the surface came in contact with Kid’s skin.

Most worryingly however, Kid couldn’t look away from the orb’s pale depths.

"Break the orb when you want the truth revealed to you. But be aware; the memories you will uncover will not be pleasant. Be warned; you will suffer."  

Kid tried to suppress a flinch but failed. It was probably the cold of the room getting to him, and definitely not Eibon’s glacial tone. Why would it affect Kid? It wasn’t as if he believed these tall tales, right?

"I advise you to break it when you're alone. Otherwise... " Eibon trailed off.

Kid looked up at the entity in expectation. ‘Otherwise’ what?

Wait, why was he even listening to that madman-?

"I fear your powers will go haywire in the brief period it'll take for you to remember. The last remnants of your… protection will also be washed away and all the power that you've been collecting all these years will burst out. You'll be put under great stress, so they'll seek to destroy what causes you pain and the collateral from this can be... severe.”

It might have been Kid’s imagination, but what little light was in the room had dimmed. The orb was
still comfortably cold in his hands and that odd mental haze still hadn’t left him.

“Your soul wavelength has been building up in your self-imposed cage for fourteen years. I dread to imagine how much of it has gathered and what the effects of unleashing it would be."

"If you're even telling the truth," Kid muttered under his breath. Still, part of him couldn’t even believe his own thoughts. If Eibon was lying to him, why do that? Why construct such an elaborate and unlikely lie?

"And my second request; a word of advice," Eibon continued as Kid out the orb away in one of his pockets, shivering as it left his touch. "Do not return to Arachne." At the mention of his mother, Kid looked up at Eibon, teeth clenched. "Nothing but pain awaits you."

"You don't know that-"

Eibon laughed. It was a terrible knowing laugh, one a person gave when they’ve witnessed a tragedy and clung on to humour as a last resort. "Oh, I know Arachne very well. If you return to her she will sense you've changed, she will recognise your no longer dormant power. Even if you don’t yet recognise who you are, Arachne will." Eibon walked closer to Kid until his frame took up all of Kid’s vision. "She will capture you and will drain you until you'd wish you were nothing but an empty husk.”

Goddammit, this did sound like how mother treated her enemies. Kid, however was her son, she wouldn’t hurt him -but what if Eibon was telling a truth Kid had been refusing to listen to-

“What…?” Kid let out and gulped. “What should I do?”

“Besides staying with me? You already know the answer.”

Did Kid know? The only option he could imagine-

"Kill her first,” Eibon concluded as silence fell among them.

Death.

No. No, fuck this, Kid would not -could not- kill anyone, especially not mother. No, he was going home, away from this mess. Arachne was his mother, he was safe with her, unlike here, where he had just been impaled and Eibon had acted like nothing had happened!

“Take me home,” Kid eventually let out, looking down and away from Eibon. He gestured to Liz and Patty. “Those two too.” Despite their less-than-stellar teamwork, the two sisters had helped Kid escape and it would be unfair to him to leave them stranded in this mad being’s place.

Silence fell among the again. Kid kept looking away, even when Eibon’s blades clinked as he took a step back and let out a deep sigh.

“Very well. I can only wish you heed my warnings in the future.” His blades tinkled again as he pointed to where Kid had stored the orb. “And that you use the tools I have given you.”

Eibon took another step back and Kid breathed deep. He was still refusing to look at the entity.

“You are -or rather were, considering your situation- my friend. My only friend,” Eibon said, and this time Kid did look up at him.

It was strange; despite the lack of a face, despite the lack of any expression, Eibon looked tired.
Exhausted. Defeated even. Eibon’s mask was turned away, and this time Kid felt like he should reach out to him.

Eibon turned around and walked away, and Kid reflexively reached out with his hand.

“Look after yourself, friend.”

Eibon vanished into the depths and Kid fell back against the wall, feeling oppressively alone.

Chapter End Notes

Comments are appreciated.
The door in Arachne’s study creaked open. A thick smoke of incense billowed out, glowing faintly orange in the dark recesses of the Witch’s study, with only a few spots illuminated by candlelight.

“Milady,” came Mosquito’s voice accompanied by a slight ruffling noise as her manservant probably removed and tipped his top hat.

Arachne didn’t bother turning around, still standing over her desk, its corners and centre illuminated by thick half-melted candles. The brighter light that came from the outside caused her to narrow her eyes. Electricity wasn’t trustworthy in highly magical environments. To be honest, fire wasn’t trustworthy as well, but Arachne had specially-prepared candles for that purpose that wouldn’t spontaneously combust into massive fireballs.

Upon receiving no acknowledgement, Mosquito cleared his throat. “The report about our… operation at the Academy is ready for review, milady.”

Oh. Arachne would have to look at it eventually; despite the devastation they had caused, including but not limited to burning that place to the ground, there were bound to be other cells, the ones that were fortunate enough to be out for an assignment, the ones that had escaped, the Deathscythes Arachne had allowed to flee…

“Thank you, Mosquito,” Arachne said, not bothering to turn around. “Leave it by my chair. I will look at it shortly.”

“Oh, of course, milady.”

Silence fell between them. After not hearing the sound of a door closing, Arachne ever so slightly turned her head, catching Mosquito standing by the doorway from the corner of her eye. He was staring at her.

“Is there anything more?” Arachne asked her voice carefully blank.

As if broken from his trance, Mosquito let out a cough and took a step back, leaving Arachne’s study. “Nothing, milady. Apologies for my intrusion, I will be taking my leave immediately.”

Turning around, Arachne was satisfied to hear the click of the door as the room darkened, once again bathed orange by candlelight.

With a sigh, Arachne looked down on the desk, where multiple bowls had tubes floated aimlessly.

Tearing her gaze away, Arachne went to the armchair, picked up the documents, then promptly
collapsed on it. She closed her eyes, let her head fall back and rubbed the bridge of her nose.

Nothing. They had found nothing.

Correction; they had found everything except the one, technically two, things they were looking for. They had accounted almost every individual, every coffin, every half-rotten twitching corpse and Kid was nowhere to be found.

Gone. He was gone. His assigned coffin was empty.

Arachne’s first initial theory had been that the records were falsified. However, the more she thought about it, the less sense it made.

First of all, falsifying records, especially ones not made specifically to be fed to enemy forces as misinformation was a terrible strategy that only caused confusion within an organisation. A thorough search of the custodian’s room has also revealed no additional records, no hint that there was a second archive of any sort. More importantly however, Kid’s assigned coffin wasn’t just empty; the wooden board serving as a door of sorts had been broken, with only a few splinters littering the inside.

Arachne’s second theory had been that Kid had somehow managed to break it out, but it was a guess she had immediately dashed it. Yes, the presence of only a few wood chips inside the coffin at first could make one think that someone had broken out. However, the same result would occur even if someone had broken the wood from the outside, simply because they’d then have to drag a body out, and end up accidentally taking out the major wood fragments with it.

Also, Kid had been decapitated. No matter how strong one’s magic was, decapitation was not an injury one could simply heal. Even Arachne doubted she could survive decapitation. Even then, the key about surviving grievous injuries was an instant and swift response; the moment the wound was inflicted magic would have to pour out of the body, coating it like frantically trying to repair the holes of a sinking ship. Yet Kid…

Paper crinkled and Arachne looked at her hand. Her hand was clenched in a fist and the report she had been holding contorted around it.

With a deep breath, Arachne got up and left the now-crumpled report on the armchair. She would look at it later, when she could focus.

Returning to her desk, Arachne looked over the objects littered on it.

A small box tittered on one of the edges and Arachne pushed it back in. Inside it were but a few sparse hairs, what little Arachne had managed to salvage while scouring Kid’s room.

Looking away, Arachne’s gaze landed on the bowls.

Right. Location spells. What a disappointment they had been these past few days.

These location spells were new, though similar to the ones she had constructed for Death in what felt like a lifetime ago. The latter ones were now stashed on a shelf under her desk. She would have to readdress them again, but not now.

The new location spells were made with Kid’s hair. Their design had been relatively easy, though Arachne had to add a lot of enhancers as a precaution. Unlike hers or Death’s Wavelength, Kid’s was underdeveloped. He was -had been a child after all.
Arachne wasn’t quite sure what her initial motivations were in creating these location spells. Whether she had been hoping to use them to locate Kid’s soul or simply confirm that she was just chasing ghosts, that didn’t matter now. Each single tube floated aimlessly, unsuccessful. No matter whether she tested for specificity, accuracy, sensitivity, or any combination of the above, the results were always the same.

Nothing.

It was as if Kid had vanished in thin air. There was no trace of him left behind, nothing Arachne could at least witness and accept the obvious. Instead of getting any sort of closure, all Arachne got was her mind racing with speculations.

Why were there no traces left? Were there any third parties involved and if so, who? Arthur, as a last, desperate, ‘fuck you’ move to Arachne? Gopher’s mysterious ‘master’? Medusa? A new faction that Arachne hadn’t encountered yet, the last part having its very own number of reasons as well?

Arachne couldn’t help but look at the tubes again, as if they’d be compelled by the power of her gaze and spring to life. As always, they maintained their directionless floating.

Arachne turned her back on the desk and her gaze fell on her armchair, where the crumpled report was. She should give it a look, sooner than later. Even if the Academy had been dealt a major blow, Arachne was sure they’d recover and attack Arachnophobia again. After all, they’d already recovered once after Death had been destroyed and Arachne’s complacency had resulted in their capture. In Kid’s…

…Not only were the Deathscythes unaccounted for, thanks to a gesture Arachne was starting to regret, but also Arthur was missing from those they’d killed or captured. Fugitives or not, what was to stop the Academy from making a move, from making a mad gamble at the plan Arthur had hinted at-?

No, that wouldn’t happen. Not for some time. Yes, she’d have to keep a very close eye on any intel about what remained of the Academy, but she wouldn’t have to worry about their plans about Death, whatever they were, for a good a while. Hopefully.

She placed the report on a coffee-table by her armchair, only to be met with a certain notebook of unknown origins.

Right. The final component in the trifecta of her migraine-inducing troubles.

Barely holding back another deep sigh, Arachne grabbed the notebook.

On the outside, this dread-inducing object looked like a perfectly normal, if not rather worn notebook. It had been found in a study dedicated to Magic Circles and had been presented to Arachne during the clean-up of their own facilities. Initially Arachne hadn’t thought much of it. It was by pure chance she’d decided to flip through it, to make sure that it was just one of her many collected works.

Her blood had run cold by the very first page. Where she had expected to see some scribblings in one language or another, perhaps a few drawings of magic circles, the notebook contained rows upon rows of Logos.

Logos. An unofficial name Arachne had given to the uncanny symbols and sigils associated with beings not of their world. Of beings one rightfully feared, if not cowered under. Death. Eibon. Excalibur. Asura, even. All of them in a group known by the apocryphal title of ‘Great Old Ones’.
Any reference to them was accompanied by such uncanny symbols which only very few people were even knowledgeable about, let alone decipher. Even Arachne, who had spent a good portion of her life dedicated to decoding these unearthly symbols, had been stumped by what she saw in the notebook; their sheer number, the mere fact they were written in what seemed to be plain graphite instead of blood or carved into leathery-pages, their overall nonchalant style as if they were written by a student as a homework assignment.

In addition, the Logos was occasionally accompanied by what Arachne could describe as amateur drawings, diagrams and graphs, clearly made by one that had little experience creating them. Some of the drawings Arachne could tolerate; though looking like they’d been made in a hurry, they had enough detail and photorealistic qualities in them that she would give them a pass. But the diagrams… badly-labelled, badly-defined axis, proportions being all over the place…

It was as if someone had purposefully combined Arachne’s pettiest and most feared dislikes.

How that object had even been created, let alone ended up in Arachnophobia, discarded in one of her studies, Arachne had no idea. She couldn’t even theorise about any of the above. She was drawing a complete blank.

So. Kid, the Academy and the Notebook. All equally worrying, for different reasons. All looming problems whose solutions stumped Arachne.

Arachne looked at the table. Maybe it was her imagination, but she heard the faint splashing of water. Perhaps one of the tubes had moved…

Arachne got up and paused. What certainly wasn’t her imagining things were the frantic footsteps, faint yells, and general rumbling coming from the outside.

Just as she was about to reach for the doorknob, the door was slammed opened as a frantic Mosquito all but barrelled inside.

“M-milady,” a breathless Mosquito gasped, gripping his knees for support, hair dishevelled. “We, it’s, your-”

Arachne frowned as her manservant stumbled over his words. Mosquito wasn’t one to panic unless the situation was grave.

Bracing herself, Arachne stood on her full height and looked down on her manservant. “Mosquito, breathe. You’re no good to me like this.”

Mosquito looked up at her, mouth agape, and Arachne crossed her hands in disapproval.

After a few moments of silent staring, Mosquito shook his head. “Right, of course, milady. We…” the manservant paused, looking between the outside and Arachne. “You have… visitors.”

Arachne’s frown deepened. All this over mere visitors? “Tell them to wait. I’m busy.”

Mosquito paled. “They- he is already on his way here, milady-“

“You’ve already let someone in without consulting me?” Arachne’s frown turned into a scowl. “Unaccompanied, nonetheless?”

To Arachne’s eternal surprise, instead of flinching or looking remotely apologetic, Mosquito stood where he was, still glancing between Arachne and the outside. “He’s with Giriko and…” He lowered his head and made several false starts. “Milady, it’s…”
Mosquito glanced at the outside again, but this time his glance turned into a stare. Gulping, Mosquito stepped outside and removed his hat. “You should see for yourself, milady.”

Still scowling, Arachne stepped outside of the room, the clean incense-free air felling foreign to her, and the bright lamp light temporarily blinding her.

After a few seconds her vision adjusted, and Arachne looked first at Mosquito. To her increasing surprise, her manservant wasn’t looking at her, but down the hallway, eyes wide.

Hesitantly, Arachne followed Mosquito’s gaze. Whatever or whoever had her loyal minion so captivated couldn’t be good news.

There were four people down the hallway, two at the front and two at the back, all of them heading to where Arachne and Mosquito were. Arachne immediately recognised Giriko in the front, though, like Mosquito, he was uncharacteristically fixated at the person by his side.

Covering the lower half of her face with her fan, Arachne took a steadying breath and closed her eyes, mentally preparing herself for who she would see by Giriko’s side. Was it Medusa? A representative of the Clowns? Someone with information related to one of Arachne’s many dead-end problems?

Arachne took a closer look and froze in place.

Kid. He was walking by Giriko, his clothes torn and bloody, with white in his hair and a scar around his neck. They were followed by two girls Arachne didn’t recognise but they didn’t matter because Kid. Walking. Looking very much alive, despite the scar, despite the blood. Nary an injury in sight.

Alive, Arachne repeated to herself. Kid was…

Arachne couldn’t move. She could only stare as Kid walked up to her. Around them, Mosquito, Giriko, the two unknown girls, were silent.

Kid stopped just a meter away from her. All Arachne had to do was take another step, open her hands and…

Even if her expression was frozen in mute shock, Arachne did the mental equivalent of a frown as she noticed a few more of Kid’s characteristics besides the ‘alive’ part. He had a blanket around him, one of unknown origins. There were patches of white in one side of his hair interspersed with black, barely wider than a fist.

More than that, Kid’s body language was apprehensive. He was looking at Arachne but wouldn’t meet her eyes. His fists were clenched and his lips were a thin line. Why…?

Wait, what was she thinking? Kid had been decapitated. Even if he was brought back somehow, one wouldn’t just let go of that incident. It would haunt anyone. Kid had every right to be apprehensive, let alone outright scared.

Kid gulped and finally looked Arachne in the eyes. “Mother-”

Her fan clattered to the ground, but Arachne didn’t care. Instead, she took a step towards Kid, the sound of her sole hitting the ground echoing in her ears as if she was in a cave. Finally, she could move.

Before Kid could say anything more, Arachne had him in a tight hug. Now that he was right in her lap, Arachne could see that it was truly Kid. It was the same face, perhaps a bit too pale, same
hesitant smile, perhaps a bit too restrained, same voice, perhaps a bit hoarse.

But that was fine. All these small discrepancies could be accounted for. Kid was here.

“How?” was all Arachne could say, barely holding her voice from breaking.

Kid’s hands wrapped around her back as he hugged her back.

“I…” His voice was barely above a whisper, but Arachne still heard him. “I don’t know.”

So, Kid had no idea, but Arachne didn’t find herself too bothered by that. No, only one thing mattered now.

Arachne hugged her child tighter, as if he’d vanish into thin air. “Welcome home.”

Her son was back.

Chapter End Notes

Reviews are appreciated.
Arachne was humming to herself. She couldn’t remember the last time she’d done that.

It might have been her imagination but the hallways were brighter. They certainly felt so, as Arachne walked through them, her mind on auto-pilot. She was in the upper part of Baba Yaga castle, making her way to the private quarters of the Castle. She would have to return to her study eventually to tidy it up, but such a task seemed trivial now. No, all her mind returned to was…

Kid. After their hug, Kid had swayed on his feet and asked to rest. Arachne had personally escorted him to his old room. Part of her had been relieved that she hadn’t yet shuttered it off; the unthinkable had happened and Kid was back.

Arachne stopped outside the door to Kid’s room. No light came from the cracks in his door. Was he sleeping?

Gently, Arachne knocked on his door.

Oddly enough, instead of the silence Arachne expected, she heard shuffling sounds, wood dragging against stone.

“Come in,” came Kid’s voice moments later. Even at the mere sound of it, Arachne couldn’t help but crack a smile. Part of her still couldn’t believe it. Kid was alive, he was here, he was safe.

Arachne opened the door and was greeted with the sight of Kid standing in the middle of his room. Strangely enough, though his bed’s overs were undone, he wasn’t dressed in his nightclothes.

Well, maybe it wasn’t that strange. Arachne had slept in her day clothes before, usually when she had been too tired or too stressed to switch to her nightgown. Considering the past few days, she should have expected something like that.

“Mother,” Kid said the moment he saw Arachne, shoulders hunched.

“Settle down. I didn’t mean to bother you,” Arachne softly said. Some of the tension in Kid’s shoulders left, but he still stood in the middle of the room, expectant.

Still smiling, Arachne looked around the room. Along with the undone covers, the desk chair was off centre. From what Arachne knew of Kid, he’d always position it properly in the middle of the desk as he got up. But the covers indicated that he had just gotten up, unless…

No, she was overthinking things. It just must be the stress again. For both of them.
“Everything seems to be in order,” Arachne casually commented before turning to Kid. “The room is just as you left it, no? I told Mosquito to get your room ready, but even he can do so much at such short notice.”

Kid perked up at that and looked around. “Oh no, everything’s…” his gaze fell on his desk and he paused, “here.”

Arachne nodded, but mentally she frowned. That pause, no matter how small, had indicated that something was wrong with Kid’s room. Was something missing? Why was Kid not telling her-?

Ugh, she was getting ahead of herself again. Even if that pause had meant that something was wrong and that Arachne wasn’t just jumping to conclusions, it didn’t mean that it was relevant to Arachne. Whatever was wrong could be a personal matter, or one Kid thought wasn’t important to bring it up. Was Arachne in Kid’s position, she doubted she’d say anything as well.

But still...

Kid scratched his neck, accidentally lowering the collar in the process, giving Arachne a glimpse of the scar.

Arachne’s smile faltered at the sight. The scar was hypertrophic, spanning the entirety of Kid’s neck. Arachne had accidentally traced it when she had given Kid a hug and that had given her pause.

Kid must have noticed Arachne’s gaze, for he brought his collar up and looked away.

The two stood in silence.

“Is there something wrong?” Arachne let out before she could stop herself. She quickly regretted her question; of course something was wrong. Kid had been decapitated. Healed or not, Arachne couldn’t expect thing to go back as they were. Everything was different now.

“You…” Kid began, still looking away. “You had a plan for escaping from the Academy. I talked to Mosquito on my way to your study.”

Arachne couldn’t help but grimace. “I’m sorry for not telling you. I thought you’d escape first with the Deathscythes.”

To her surprise, Kid snorted. “I should have, but I messed it up.”

That… was a strangely nonchalant response. Unlike what Arachne had suspected so far, Kid sounded rather... unaffected by the experience? As if he was recalling a bad meal than a near-death - or technically-death- experience.

“Well, it’s in the past now. You’re here now,” Arachne said, giving Kid a smile. Now was not the time to dwell on this. It could be that Kid hadn’t fully processed what was going on.

Kid glanced at her before looking at his bed. “Is…” he hesitantly began. “Was my injury something one could recover from?”

Arachne gave Kid a frown. Well, he had said that he didn’t know how that had happened. She could imagine that would be troubling, not knowing what you are capable of. It was natural Kid would have questions.

The only issue was that Arachne was supposed to have the answers, but now, she was coming up short.
“Normally, I’d say no. Even with magic…” Arachne said, making sure not to tell only truths, though not the full truths. It would help her little if she told Kid she honestly had no idea how his recovery had happened. “Though, I suppose there are certain beings that could…” she trailed off, careful not to mention that said beings were very old enemies. She was fairly certain Kid wasn’t one of them, Arachne mentally noted in good humour.

Kid sighed. “I’ll take that as a no.”

“Don’t worry. I’m sure in time we will figure this out,” Arachne said and she as telling the full truth now. Little by little, they would get to the bottom of the mystery that was Kid’s ancestry.

Kid simply looked away and Arachne felt some of her previous cheer vanish. Evidently, Kid wasn’t sharing her optimistic sentiment.

“Are you sure you’re feeling alright?” Arachne asked.

Kid, still looking away, gave her a small shrug. “Sorry. I’m just tired.”

Arachne let out a good-natured sigh. “Understandable. Make sure to get a good night’s sleep, alright?”

After Kid gave her a nod, Arachne turned to leave and walked by the doorway. However, at the last moment she stopped and turned around.

“And Kid…” Before her child could react, Arachne had him in a tight hug. He was still so small and thin, she could feel his ribs… “I’m glad you’re here.”

It took a few moments, but Kid finally hugged her back. “Me too, mother.”

With a smile, Arachne finally left the room and softly closed the door behind her. Giving a final look at Kid’s room, Arachne walked down the hallway, humming to herself again. Time to tidy up her study and then finally call rest as well.

Tomorrow would be a better day.

\*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~

The moment Arachne closed the door, Kid stood still in the darkness of his room, listening.

There were the sounds of footsteps, growing more distant by the second.

With a sigh, Kid activated his Soul Perception. Just as his hearing indicated, Arachne was walking away.

After he felt mother was a reasonable distance away, Kid sat by the edge of his bed, slumped forward. His gaze fell on his desk and he grimaced.

Just as he’d expected, his notebook as nowhere to be found. Even if Kid knew his notebook wouldn’t be in the room, part of him hoped it was, even by some magical means.

His first option was to search in mother’s study dedicated to Magic Circles, as if it’d been left behind like the small debris that still littered Baba Yaga Castle. However, Kid had been strung along ever since he stepped inside the Castle and hadn’t had a chance to wonder yet. But, if Kid went to the study and the notebook was gone…

Maybe his notes had fallen into the Academy’s hands, where anyone, Arthur included, could have
gotten their hands on it. Or maybe, hopefully, it had been destroyed when mother Giriko and Mosquito escaped.

Well, in any case it wasn’t as if anyone could read it. Hopefully. The notebook had been encrypted via that strange system of symbols Kid had thought he’d come up with, a notion he had been doubting ever since Eibon showed him more of these symbols. While initially Kid had hoped his notes had survived, somehow, now all he could wish was that they’d been destroyed, that the notebook was gone like a snuffed flame, as if the unsettling feeling settling in his stomach ever since his encounter with Eibon would disappear with it.

Another thing Kid worried about were the sisters. Though they didn’t have a choice in leaving Eibon’s quarters, they had stuck along with Kid as he ventured into Arachnophobia. Last Kid saw of them, they were escorted to their new rooms by Mosquito.

Kid would have to talk to them first thing in the morning. It wasn’t just to make sure that they were alright, or even out of some obligation for their help; no, Kid had to make sure they would say nothing about Eibon. He had already told them so before they entered Baba Yaga Castle, but he might as well repeat himself.

Well, he supposed he’d also have to acclimate them to how things were run here. That is, if they wanted to stay. Or even if they’d been allowed to stay; he had no idea what mother thought of the duo. Speaking off…

Kid fell back on his bed and grimaced as the something dug at his spine.

Right. That thing.

Reaching under his mattress, Kid took out the offending object. Eibon’s orb shone slightly in the darkness, its pale depths still incomprehensible to Kid.

Eibon’s essence. Their knowledge about the Grim Reaper. Supposedly, their knowledge about Kid.

…That had to be a lie, right? All Eibon had said, about Death, about Arachne, about Kid being Death…

No. No, Kid was fairly certain he wasn’t one of mother’s vanquished arch-enemies. Even if he was, wouldn’t she have noticed? She had looked into his ancestry before, when Kid was younger. But maybe…

Maybe that was way she’d never found anything. Because all the obvious choices, Witch, Weapon, even Immortal, were not what Kid was. Because what Kid truly was, was something so preposterous it hadn’t even crossed mother’s mind as a consideration.

But now… if mother started researching again, if Kid’s injury caused her to consider more possibilities, even the utterly absurd ones, then maybe…

No, Kid had nothing to be afraid of. He had done nothing wrong. Mother would realise that, right? Even if the worst came to pass and Kid was, somehow, the Grim Reaper, mother wouldn’t just attack him, blindly right? Yes, maybe she’d get angry, or confused, but she’d come around eventually right? Kid was her son.

But then there was Eibon’s warning.

‘If you return to her she will sense you’ve changed, she will recognise your no longer dormant power. Even if you don’t yet recognise who you are, Arachne will. She will capture you and will
What he had said about mother’s nature, about what she would do if she found out, echoed in Kid’s mind and sent a shiver up his spine. If Eibon turned out to be true and Arachne did attack him, did resent him…

Kid pocketed the orb and fell back in his bed.

He was tired, he should sleep. And hey, if Kid felt like he had to sleep meant that he wasn’t a Grim Reaper, right?

Maybe… Maybe Kid should tell her? Maybe he should tell Arachne about his meeting with Eibon, about what had been said to him? If she heard it from Kid himself, then in the impossible scenario Eibon’s words were true, maybe she wouldn’t attack Kid. Why would she when Kid was the one who’d told her? But then if she thought that this was some sort of trap, some ploy to gain her trust -which technically it was- then there would be repercussions. Severe repercussions.

But then again, what else could Kid do?

‘Kill her,’ Eibon’s voice echoed.

Kid shook his dead. No, that was not acceptable. Even if Kid could -which he definitely couldn’t, not when he was so powerless, not when Mosquito and Giriko were with her- the very notion made his stomach lurch. Even if everything fell into place nice and neatly and all Kid had to do was give it a little push…

No. He wouldn’t kill mother, he refused to.

But then, what else could he do? Do nothing and hope his encounter with Eibon never amounted to anything? Continue living as if he had never been decapitated -which oddly enough, Kid recalled with much less dread than his talks with Eibon- and then healed it as if it was nothing?

As if nothing had changed?

Chapter End Notes

Comments are appreciated.
Candlelight flickered as Arachne entered her study room. Slowly and methodically, she began cleaning the central table, clearing away excess and unneeded material.

Her gaze fell on the location spells, Kid’s tubes. They still floated directionlessly.

With a frown, Arachne leaned over the tubes. It was strange that they’d never moved; her location spells were usually successful. They should have detected Kid’s wavelength, especially when he had turned out to be so close. Or even now, they should at least be trembling in a recognition of their target’s proximity.

As Arachne took a step forward and reached out for one of the bowls, her foot stepped in something wet. Looking down, she saw a tiny puddle of water, spanning just the edge and underneath of the table.

With a frown, Arachne ran her hand on the edge of the table just above the puddle. Dry. So, where had the water come from? Underneath? There was a small self-like structure under her table. What had she been storing down there again?

Arachne bent down and searched the shelf underneath. Her hand caught the wet edges of a bowl and slowly retracted her hand. If she remembered correctly, she had stored some old location spells about Death…

The bowl came into her point of view and she almost dropped it in shock.

Clutching the bowl with both hands, knuckles white, Arachne looked transfixed at the tube.

It had found a target. As the water around it pooled and formed small waves, the tube remained unaffected, pointing stubbornly in a single direction.

With a trembling hand, Arachne placed the bowl on the floor and took out the rest of the bowls. In each, all the tubes pointed in the same direction.

Arachne spent the next minute sitting on the floor, looking transfixed at the tubes. Occasionally, she would turn the bowls, only to see the tube rotate and keep pointing in the same direction. There was no doubt they had all found their target.

Death.

Slowly, Arachne covered her mouth with her hand and closed her eyes. Her stomach churned.
If it had been just one tube, the Arachne could have excused it as a glitch. If all the tubes were moving but in different directions, Arachne could attribute it to the magically charged air of the room. But this unison movement, this common direction they were all pointing at, left nothing to the imagination.

Had the Academy already accomplished its goal, somehow, despite Arachne burning their central HQ into the ground? Maybe. The tubes could only point at someone’s wavelength, so perhaps it hadn’t been a full revival, in which case Arachne needed to make her move, fast.

Arachne looked down at the bowls. The tubes all moved in unison, ever so slightly. Death’s wavelength was moving. Judging from their small imperceptible change, then either Death’s wavelength had moved a long distance and was far away, or it had moved a little and was awfully close.

Arachne should at least make some initial investigation. Even if she only ended up with a general direction of Death’s wavelength, it was something; something she had maps, forces and influence to deal with that.

She would also have to open a line to Clowns and Medusa. If Death was back, then the Grim Reaper would be coming for all their skins. Now was not the time for petty conflicts, not when they had to ensure their continued existence.

Carefully, Arachne picked up one of the bowls. Some water spilled out of it, but the tube stubbornly pointed in the same direction as before. Just further confirmation of the dreaded return of an old enemy.

She opened the door to her study and walked out, bowl in hand. Even in this was the dead of night, Arachne would at least manage to do something; she doubted she could sleep peacefully again for a long time, when that dreaded guillotine at her neck was back.

Arachne wondered the hallways of the Castle with rising dread. Even walking a small distance would cause the tube to change direction, like a rotating compass. The uniform change as she kept an even pace confirmed Arachne’s worst fear. Not only was Death back, they were close.

Eventually, she reached a point where a mere step from her would cause the tube to swerve wildly. Arachne was close, disturbingly so.

Arachne looked around. She also had no idea where she had wandered into, having followed the tube blindly for a good half hour. The hallways were very familiar. In fact, she was…

Her eyes landed at Kid’s door and Arachne dropped her bowl.

No, no, Death couldn’t be there, of all places, not when Kid had just come back-

Practically crushing the doorknob, Arachne almost tore the door off its hinges as she entered the room, magic swelling at her fingertips.

She was met with silence. Besides Kid’s sleeping form, there was no one else in the room.

Her breaths shallow, Arachne looked back to the discarded bowl. Even if it was overturned, there was still some water in it left, enough for the tube to rattle away and splash more of it on the floor.

Arachne took a step back and bent down for the tub. She felt it wiggle in her palm. Though it had missed the mobility given to it by water, the attraction was strong; it was dealing with Death’s wavelength after all.
The Witch narrowed her eyes at Kid’s room. Perhaps the tube was attracted to an object in here rather than a presence. After all there were many objects associated with Death. Perhaps Kid had accidentally brought one with him.

Arachne stepped inside the room, laying the tube flat in her palm. Kid’s bed was to her right, the desk to her left and the window was ahead of her.

The tube twitched on Arachne’s palm, before pointing to her right.

No. Feeling a lump growing in her throat, Arachne closed her hand on the tube and withdrew it. The tub wiggled inside her palm as she moved her hand behind her back.

Eventually, the tub calmed down its movements, its sharp end having dug through the softer areas between one’s fingers. Pointing at Kid, at her son-

No, this couldn’t be right. There had to be some kind of mistake. Perhaps if she…

Arachne silently walked right next to Kid’s sleeping form. Her palm still closed, she held it over his frame -he was so thin- and finally opened it.

Seconds later the tube stood upright in her palm, its edge pointing downwards.

At Kid.

Arachne's eyes widened. Her gaze turned to the boy, as if seeing him for the first time. If the tube was right then Kid was-

No.

No.

No, no, no-

She must be missing something. She must have misunderstood something. She must have done something wrong, because the only other alternative meant she was right-

No…

It would explain why ‘Kid’ had come back, why his body and very soul had been missing-

No.

It would explain how he’d found her-

No-

Why not? Arachne was no fool. She knew very well the horrors lying in wait just at the edge of one’s imagination, of the apocryphal rituals and exploits of the Grim Reaper. Possessing a deceased person’s body would rank low on her list of terrors-

But Kid had just come back-

Kid’s- The form shifted in the bed. Arachne took a step back, putting both hands behind her back.

The… person on the bed rolled over towards Arachne. His- Their eyes briefly widened at Witch’s form -a sign of terror? Kid would have no reason to do that- before settling for a confused half-lidded
look a trick, a cheap imitation-

"Mother?" they asked, voice low as they rubbed their eyes.

Mother? Mother?

How dare it call her that? How dared it play this cruel trick on her?

Mother?

‘Kid’ let out a small yawn -Gods even such a simple mannerism was painful to look at- as they sat up. “Why are you in my room?”

Arachne’s lips stretched into two thin lines as she gave Ki- Death a fake smile. “Apologies, I didn’t mean to wake you up.” Her voice was low and soft like tar as the tube writhed in Arachne’s palm, its sharp end digging at her skin towards the being at the bed. “I thought I heard something.”

“Heard something?” they repeated, frowning. Was that fear? Worry?

Arachne’s smile was painful. “It’s nothing.”

She turned away and walked at the edge of the room. Just as she placed her hand on the doorknob, she paused.

Her behaviour had been suspicious, from her sudden appearance to her vague explanation as to why. Anyone in their right mind would have dropped whatever charade they were holding up, or at least consider doing so. Yet, whoever was on that bed, hadn’t. Perhaps…

Perhaps she had missed something, perhaps she had misunderstood something, perhaps there was something going on she didn’t understand, perhaps…

“Why?” Arachne asked just when she was about to close the door. “Is there something you want to tell me?”

The silence that stretched between them was the final nail in the coffin.

“No,” the being in the bed eventually said, and Arachne’s palm pressed down on the tube, crushing it.

Feeling her smile falter, Arachne faced away from the room as she stepped outside, the door behind her creaking as she pulled it back.

“Goodnight,” came a voice, Kid’s voice just as the door closed.

Arachne didn’t respond.

After the door finally closed, Arachne’s knees wobbled. She brought a hand to her throat, as if she could massage away a built-up scream. Her eyes felt wet, same as her feet, standing on the puddle left behind by a discarded bowl.

With mechanical movements, Arachne picked up the bowl, deposited the tube’s remains - along with some of her blood- in and walked away.

She could see it now. Hell, it should have been obvious from the moment he- they had arrived. The skin had been paler, and the body had become even more skinny. There were dark circles under the eyes. The eyes themselves… Though their colour remained the same, their depths had changed...
Something ancient lurked beneath the yellow orbs.

Finally, there was the hair. Even in the darkness, Arachne had made out that the substantial patch of the married in white had been arranged in three perfectly straight lines, the Grim Reaper’s defining feature, the goddamned half-formed Lines of Sanzu and oh Gods how had Arachne been so deluded by grief to think that for one moment the stranger that returned had been her child?

How had she missed this? Had she been too blinded by Kid’s return? It all seemed so obvious now.

The person on the bed was not her child. Not anymore.

Chapter End Notes

Comments are appreciated.
Kid exited his room the same time he did so every day. Following his usual routine, he had taken a quick shower, gotten dressed and was heading to the man dining hall for breakfast. Once there, he would have a small meal prepared by Mosquito. He’d be joined by mother, the Thompson sisters, occasionally Giriko and they’d…

Well, Kid wanted to say that he’d make small talk with mother while they ate, but his last few meals, including lunch and dinner, had been had in mostly silence. Mother would focus on her plate and barely acknowledge Kid. If Kid did try to talk to her, he’d be met with quick non-committal answers. At least Liz would occasionally speak up and Kid was grateful for the brief respite she offered between the long stretches of uncomfortable silence.

To add to that, Kid would likely not see mother for the rest of the day. She now spent most of her time in the study or in closed-door meetings. Even Kid’s schooling had been put on hold, like an unexpected vacation break. At first Kid thought that was because mother wanted to give him time to rest and recover, but the days stretched into a week and he still hadn’t been informed of whether his lessons would continue, let alone when.

At first, Kid had been slightly perturbed by mother’s distant attitude but he had rationalised it as her way to cope with the circumstances. Kid had just come back from the dead and offered no concrete explanation to her after all. But then he couldn’t help but remember Eibon, his figure towering over kill telling him that he was…

Kid unconsciously reached out for Eibon’s orb, stashed away safely on one of the inner pockets of his jacket. He had kept the object close to him ever since he arrived in Baba Yaga, as a way to making sure that the orb wouldn’t fall into the wrong hands and lead to a series of grave misunderstandings. Kid had also thought of disposing the object, but he never went through with any of his plans.

Finally, Kid entered the dining hall only to find it empty.

“Hey.”
Almost empty.

In the long central table sat Liz with Patty next to her. The table was empty, lacking the silverware, hand towels and plates that usually should be there, a task Mosquito took as seriously as everything else.

Kid looked around. “Where is everyone?”

Liz shrugged. “Place’s been empty. It’s just me and Patty and we’ve been here for like, an hour or so.”

“I’m hungry…” Patty groaned and she collapsed face-first on the table.

“I know,” Liz sympathetically said as she gave her sister a pat on the back before turning to Kid. “Think everyone slept in? Guessing you guys don’t get like, strikes, and stuff like that.”

Kid frowned. Liz was right, this place shouldn’t be empty. Had something happened?

Kid turned around, about to leave the dining hall and scour the castle with his Soul Perception when Liz spoke up: “Going somewhere?”

Kid halted mid-step. Right, he should tell them. In fact he ought to do more, as he was the one that brought them into this mess. He should warn them.

“You should leave.”

Liz frowned. “Huh? Hey, my sis is hungry-”

“You should leave the Castle.”

“Oh, so you’re kicking us out, typical.” Despite her flippant tone there was a hint of desperation in Liz’s voice. “Come on, I told I’m not gonna say anything about the Eib-”

“Don’t even bring that up in passing,” Kid cut her off with a hiss as he turned around. “Something’s wrong.”

Liz rolled her eyes. “What, because no one showed up? Paranoid much?”

Kid held back a scoff. He had every right to be paranoid especially when mother might suspect that he was the Grim Reaper, of all beings.

“If something is going on, we are all in grave danger. If…” Kid swallowed down a lump in his throat. “If I’m suspected to be hostile they are going to come after you two as well and mother will not be kind.”


Kid wasn’t so sure about that anymore.

Liz’s expression fell the more the silence between her and Kid stretched. “Fuck’s sake, you ain’t lying.” She glanced at Patty. “How likely do you think something’s up?”

“I don’t know.”

Liz cursed and poked Patty. “Hey, Patty… How do you feel like taking a walk?”
“But I’m tired… and hungry…”

“The kitchens are on the ground floor of the west wing,” Kid explained. “It also has big enough windows for you to jump through and escape.”

“Escape…” Liz repeated, face darkening. “Patty come on. Transform, I’ll carry you.”

“Ok…” Patty said with a groan as she transformed into her Weapon form.

As Liz, with Patty’s Weapon form in hand, stood up and was about to head outside, Kid let out a sigh and closed his eyes.

He hadn’t expected their conversation to go this way. He had only intended to tell Liz and Patty to go to their room and stay there until Kid cleared things up with mother. However, her continued silence, this sudden disappearance, all added up to a sneaking suspicion that mother was already onto Kid’s secret. If that was true then the best course of action Kid had was try and tell his side of the story, or lack thereof, and just hope things would work themselves out. Otherwise…

He gulped. It was true what he had said to Liz about mother not being kind. However, that would only be because the sisters were unwilling conspirators. When it came to Kid himself and the rumours of being a Grim Reaper…

“She will capture you and will drain you until you’d wish you were nothing but an empty husk,’ Eibon’s words reverberated in his mind.

No…

Yes, mother would do that to her enemy, especially to one as old and feared as Death. She would be downright ruthless and cruel, inflicting a cold-blooded torturous fate to even suspected remnants of her enemy. Kid had heard of what happened to the Academy after all, their HQ burned to their ground with most of their forces killed or missing.

Still, Kid was her son and despite what Arthur, what everyone else believed, mother did care about him. Even… even if he was a Grim Reaper…

“Hey, one last thing before we leave,” came Liz’s words, breaking Kid out of his train of thought. He looked up at her, her wary glance only making him more anxious. “Did…” she hesitated. “Did you do something to me?”

Kid blinked. What did she mean? Kid had barely interacted with Liz after Eibon, the sisters simply following him as they were dropped outside Baba Yaga Castle.

Unless Liz mean before that, when Kid was dangling and he was desperate and their hands reached out to him, somehow, refusing to let go when he ordered them too. When held been captured by Noah and Kid saw memories that weren’t his own, of Liz’s head held underwater as her heart faltered and breaths stilled. When they were in Eibon’s adobe and Liz was unaffected by the cold despite being able to sense it.

Kid looked away from Liz, from her pale skin, her slightly clouded eyes, desperate for an answer he didn’t have. Or rather there was an answer he did have, but one that would require accepting that he was…

Just more nails in a long-shut coffin.

“I don’t know,” Kid lied, looking away.
“Great,” Liz said, voice dripping with sarcasm. If she suspected Kid’s lies she didn’t show it. “Thanks for the heads up I guess.” She paused before exiting, giving Kid a long look. “And uh, good luck.”

With that she and Patty left the room and headed for the kitchens, leaving Kid alone in the dining hall. With each sound magnified by the empty walls, Kid took out Eibon’s orb. Its pale depths stirred as they always did. Black strands reached out from the core, touching the surface where Kid’s skin was, as if magnetised.

This was it, wasn’t it? There was no other way now, not with how things had turned out. With a still fresh scar around his neck, mother’s absence and a suspiciously empty dining hall, the best Kid could hope for now was for the truth to come out in the least ugly way possible. Hell, Kid would be ok with getting roughed up a bit on the revelation part, as long as…

His Soul Perception picked up mother’s soul on the centre of the castle. Mosquito and Giriko were with her along with-

Red. Red, scabby soul, the same red abomination that unfortunate Arachnophobia member had had many years ago and Kid’s hands balled into a tight fist. His breath hitched and for a moment the only thought that was on his mind was ripping that wretched red from its mortal coil before it could spread any more of its infecting chaos…

Kid took a steadying breath. He had to restrain himself. That soul was not Arachnophobia, mother had made sure of that ever since Kid’s incident. The soul most likely belonged to the Clowns, the faction that still worshipped their fallen God Asura. They were a mad, soul eating group, with each of its members more twisted and horrifying than the next and why was mother meeting with them?

Feeling his throat constrict, Kid put the orb in his trousers’ pocket, making sure he had an easy reach for it, just in case. He took a deep breath. So, this was happening.

Clutching the orb in his pocket, Kid made his way towards the main hall.

\*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*

“Lady Arachne.”

The Witch closed her fan and looked down on her throne at the new arrival.

His voice was smooth as honey and equally nauseating. His hunched form was mostly obscured by ragged and patched clothing that made him resemble a down-on-his luck turn-of-the-century clown. Fitting, she supposed. The only visible parts of him was a protruding crooked nose and a pair of long, needle-like fingers. The less that could be said about his breath and general stench, the better.

The Clown’s dispatch. Finally.

“So, they had thought that Arachne had finally lost her mind. Oh, if only. That would mean that her theory wasn’t true, that the being she housed was Kid, safe and sound.

Another person came to stand by the Clown, and Arachne felt the colour drain from her face, only to be soon replaced with white-hot fury.

“Medusa,” the Arachne intoned. “Why are you here?”
Medusa appeared from the shadows and gave her a solemn nod. “The Elder kindly asked me to accompany him,” she said in an even tone and gestured to the Clown next to her. “He rightly assumed that my research into Kishin and his relationship to the Grim Reaper will be of great relevance to them. Oh, but first, my condolences.”

Arachne listened with a barely concealed scowl. Medusa’s reason for being here was as fake as her sombre attitude. True, her sister’s research, if it could be called that, did have to do about the Kishin’s origins. It was a field of study Arachne no longer had any interest in, with the Kishin Asura having been defeated long ago. Not to mention Medusa’s experiments were a secret even from her, and from what rumours her spiders had picked up, they often involved her own child…

Arachne’s grip on her fan tightened. Even with the debated relevance of Medusa’s research, there was no reason for her to assist the capture, to be here. Especially after her vague warnings, her constant jabs… The nerve-!

No, Medusa had been right. Her warning, no matter how vague, had turned out to be true. It was Arachne’s stubbornness that caused her to let Arachnophobia fall vulnerable, that lead to her Kid and Giriko to be captured, that led to Kid…

“Very well,” Arachne finally let out and addressed the Clown. “I assume you’ve come prepared.”

“Oh certainly,” the Clown said with a bow. “Considering the being we are facing, we saw fit to bring special equipment for the task.”

A door behind Arachne's spiderweb-throne opened and Giriko slowly made his way inside. He heaved as he pulled a chain he had wrapped around his torso, dragging a coffin-like object behind him.

Arachne raised an eyebrow at the Clown's 'special equipment'. To say it looked like a schizophrenic’s dream of an iron maiden would be an understatement; it was shaped like a sarcophagus of old with magic circles littering its surface, some of them glowing red. Heavy chains with their own set of magic circles were wrapped around the structure, keeping it shut.

“Are you sure that will be enough?” Arachne asked.

The Clown gave her another bow. “As certain as we can be. Once sealed, the only way to open it would be with a special incantation. Otherwise, not even air can escape. The spikes inside are also constructed to continually drip deadly poison, though we fear in this case they will only be able to temporarily immobilise our captive.” He turned to Medusa. “Your sister’s brilliant design, Lady Arachne.”

“You flatter me, Elder,” Medusa replied, with venom disguised as honey dripping from each word.

As the sarcophagus reached the middle of the room, Giriko let the chains fall with a grunt, the resulting clang echoing across the room. He stretched with a pained groan, earning him a disapproving look by Mosquito who had been standing quietly by the main entrance. Just when he was about to open his mouth and probably earn Arachne’s disapproval as well, a knock came from the main entrance.

Everyone went silent. Wordlessly, Mosquito turned around and, standing on his tiptoes, peered into the eyehole that gave one view outside the main entrance.

“It’s him, milady,” Mosquito said, tone emotionless. Despite not actually naming the person outside, everyone understood it was Death. “I believe he wants to enter.”
The Clown physically recoiled at the announcement, stepping back into the shadows as if he could hide in them. Medusa narrowed her eyes, turned to the main entrance and crossed her hands. Despite her composed look, the way she fiddled with the bracelet around her forearm betrayed her nervousness.

Arachne grimaced. Right outside her door. Had he gotten suspicious? Perhaps he had used the Soul Perception and sensed the Clown. Even then though, Kid too had an aversion to Kishin Eggs...

“Well, Elder, I suppose it is time to test out your plan. Mosquito, Giriko be on standby and wait for my orders.”

Despite her flippant tone, Arachne only felt anger, mixed with an increasing dread. Even if all signs pointed at Kid being truly gone and the being outside their door being Death… What if Arachne was wrong? What if it truly was Kid outside and, somehow, all these signs had been false red flags? What if…?

Giriko revved up chains running across his torso, as Mosquito removed his hat. Medusa and the Elder fully stepped into the shadows.

Arachne held her head up and opened her fan as the door of the main entrance creaked open. It was too late for doubts now.

Chapter End Notes

Comments are appreciated.
Nightmare (satanwave)

Chapter Notes

Link to playlist: https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PL5NETqX6IwDY07_D49mrOgqtZ5YSSCdFS

Don’t forget to listen to the songs!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Kid waited outside the main hall with trepidation. His Soul Perception picked up Giriko and Mosquito heading towards the entrance, while mother, Aunt Medusa and that disgusting Clown remained stationary.

Kid’s face shifted to a slight frown. What on Earth was mother doing meeting with these people? Was she planning an alliance with the Kishin’s Clowns to retaliate against what was left of the Academy? If so, why was Aunt Medusa here as well?

Before Kid could ponder the reason behind Arachnophobia’s ‘guests’, the massive vaulted doors creaked open. Candlelight spilled in the hallway behind Kid -had he walked all this way while bathed in darkness?- as he stood at the precipice between rooms.

Kid squinted and when his eyes adjusted to the light, he saw mother stare down at him from her throne with a neutral expression. Though Kid could sense Aunt Medusa’s and the Clown’s soul, they were further back hidden away from view. A strange sarcophagus-like contraption stood in the middle of the hall. An even stranger thing about the room though were Mosquito and Giriko. Mosquito’s hat lay at his lap, while Giriko’s back was hunched, the faint rumblings of his engine coming from his form. Mosquito’s gaze was fixed on Kid while Giriko was looking away, lips curled. Were they preparing for a fight?

Kid’s first instinct was to run but he stood still, hoping he wasn’t acting like a deer in headlights. He never thought this was gonna be easy, but if Kid was already suspected of being a Grim Reaper then it would only make matters worse of him.

“Yes?” came mother’s voice after a period of silence. It was as cold as her expression and shiver went up Kid’s spine.

“I…” Kid began, keeping his hands firmly at his sides and trying to make himself as non-threatening as possible, “I need to tell you something.” He glanced at Mosquito and Giriko to gauge their reactions, but Mosquito’s gaze remained firm while Giriko shifted, as if trying to prevent his tense muscles from cramping.

Great, this was going from bad to worse.

“What is it?” Mother asked. Her tone was glacial and Kid held back a flinch.

“I need to tell you in private,” Kid let out after a few seconds. Even if mother didn’t try to kill him, he couldn’t say the same about Aunt Medusa or that disgusting red soul. Mosquito and Giriko may also attack him if they saw Kid as a threat, which was a sure-fire way for everything to go to hell in a
“Why?” came mother’s voice, just as cold as before.

Kid grit his teeth but still didn’t dare look up, instead glancing at Mosquito and Giriko, who had both taken a step towards him. Dammit, this was like pulling teeth.

“It’s…” Kid hesitated. “It’s about what happened while we were captured by the Academy,” he eventually said, hoping it wouldn’t make him any more suspicious than he already was, or that it would somehow relieve the suffocated atmosphere of the main hall.

No such luck. If anything, the lack of response and ensuing silence only made Kid feel like all the air had been sucked out of the room.

With a gulp, Kid looked up. “Mother?”

Mother’s-Arachne’s face was scrunched up in disgust.

Arachne thought herself a cold-hearted woman. Oh, she could be kind, gentle, maternal, and of a general caring disposition if she wished, but doing so required effort on her part. Arachne was aware of her callous nature, or how she would perform feats or dictate orders that would have other squirming in their seats while battling with their conscience and morality. Arachne did have a conscience per se, as well as a set of morals, but the former had been withered away by her lived experiences, while the latter were a series of guidelines that should ideally follow.

Point being, Arachne had plenty of experience being subjected to cruelty and being cruel herself. The Old Witch had beheld horrifying designs and her first reaction had been to wonder about how she would make them more efficient, instead of sending her down a spiral of doubting vague notions of humanity. She had watched and performed acts of torture without batting an eye, as well as had similar procedure performed on her on the few occasions she had found herself in true peril. The Mother of Demons had performed ritualistic sacrifice that involved those of her own kin, she meddled with souls despite their heart-stopping cries, she stared down Death without flinching. Throughout all this, she had come out stronger, convinced that the list of things that could truly horrify her was becoming smaller with each traumatic event that didn’t break her.

This however… Watching the cold-blooded murder of her child was one thing, one more scar to add to her sickening collection. Having one of her most feared and despised archenemies take up the body of her diseased child and pretend to be him however, even going as far as to call her ‘mother’ with that same voice, that same tone…

Arachne was stricken with grief, but she only allowed it to physically manifest as a scowl of such fury that would have grown adults cower like children. Her initial plan of pretending to be unaware of Death’s disgusting ploy until he eventually grew bored or too suspicious and made the first move was over. She no longer had to pretend to be unaware of his shtick even if it sent waves of revulsion across her soul. There were no more appearances to keep. Time to make her move.

“Mother what’s-”

“Who are you?” Arachne let out, barely restraining herself from growling the question. Even if this was over, she wanted Death to admit to this repulsive trick, to give up the ghost and face her like the goddamn eldritch being that he was, not as her son-

Ki-Death took a step back, their expression a perfect imitation of confusion and dread. “I-I’m Kid-”
“No, you’re not,” Arachne cut him off, her hands balling into fists when Death dared refer to himself by that name. “Don’t mock me like that.”

Arachne was stuck between delight and horror when Ki-Death’s stolen face fell, his hesitant smile replaced by an expression of abject terror. Though it was her enemy was making such an expression, the face belonged to her son and it reminded her the last time she had seen such a look on him, just before he had been...

The doors behind the main hall closed as Giriko and Mosquito slowly approached Death. However, her enemy’s attention was solely focused on her, as if no one else in the room existed. “Wait-”

“I don’t care what reasons you had to do something this underhanded, or why you still insist on keeping up that guise,” Arachne continued, biting down her tongue to stop tears of indignation that threatened to spill out. “Your machinations end now, Death.”

K-Death’s face momentarily froze before going through a myriad of expressions. Ah there it was, that spark of recognition, of familiarity at Death’s name, something Kid would never have.

“No,” Death choked, “I’m not-”

“The more you keep impersonating my child, the deeper the grave you’re digging, so how about you discard this disguise, stop being a coward and face me-!”

“It’s me, mom!” the yell reverberated across the room and Arachne froze. This was… this was Kid’s voice, the tone, the intonation, the way he said mom like he had last time when Arachne had accidentally strung him up-

It was fortunate Arachne was sitting down, for her knees went weak, her breath hitched. This couldn’t be… Could an imitation be this perfect?

Arachne couldn’t do this, not anymore. She wanted a break, she wanted to lay down, to let herself curl up into a ball-

"Lady Arachne,” came the Clown’s voice, causing her to jolt. “I believe it is obvious now. Your orders?”

Death -Kid?- craned his neck to see who was hiding in the shadows, giving Arachne a brief view of his collar and the scar that lay underneath.

The scar. The scar that used to be torn, bleeding flesh, a wound no living being could recover from…

“Get him,” Arachne snapped, not wanting to hear any more of that voice. Even if she was aware that something else was pulling the strings it did so with such craft that she may even delude herself into thinking it was real.

Her eyes locked with Dea- Ki- Death’s and Arachne hated every moment of it.

"I want Death out of my sight."
Oh no

Reviews/Comments are appreciated.
Kid had barely registered the thrum of Giriko’s chains before he instinctively dodged out of their way, his mind momentarily stalled by staring into mother’s hate-filled eyes. Moments later there was a flash of light and the floor had been standing on was cracked. Eyes wide, Kid coughed at the gathered dust as he brought himself off the ground, only to jump away again when Giriko’s chains made a beeline for him.

“Wait!” Kid called out but Giriko attacked again and he had to keep dodging or risk losing a limb. “I don’t want to fight you!” Hell, Kid couldn’t fight them! It was a miracle he hadn’t been cut in half yet!

“Shut the hell up you Reaper bastard!” Giriko yelled as he aimed another kick at Kid, who had to fall back, causing his back to hit the wall.

Goddammit, they were following mother’s orders, and Kid had no clue what she thought was going on between him and the Grim Reaper situation. Did she think Kid had been pretending all the time? Or that he wasn’t Kid anymore? If it was any of the above then Kid would have to convince her that he still was himself, that he hadn’t known about this as well…

Or maybe all that mattered was that Kid was the Grim Reaper; the why and how were irrelevant, in which case there was nothing Kid could do, nothing he could say.

“Such a display is disgraceful!” came Mosquito’s voice from his side and Kid rolled away as a stinger pierced the wall behind him. Dammit, not only did he have to worry about Giriko, there was Mosquito as well. At least the latter hadn’t transformed in any of his older forms yet, but if- when he did, Kid had no idea what to do other than run.

Giriko, perhaps because his chains had missed their target, aka Kid’s torso, and had travelled a wide arc rendering them momentarily unusable, lunged at Kid with a haymaker. Kid caught the punch with one hand, momentarily stunned by his own strength as he held Giriko’s attack at bay.

A sharp pain at his ribcage came at Kid’s side and he looked down to see Mosquito’s stinger pierce right through him.

Swerving around, Kid grabbed Giriko’s forearm and tossed him at Mosquito. The man flying off with a frustrated stream of curses, while Mosquito’s stinger detaching from Kid’s body with a wet squelch.

“You… morons…” Kid coughed out as he clutched his bleeding side, shuddering when he felt the
skin mend itself.

Giriko got up with a curse and glared daggers as Kid. Mosquito copied the gesture, only much more elegantly and wiping his mouth with his sleeve.

“This blood…” Mosquito scrunched his nose and spit a dark red substance. “It belongs to a Grim Reaper, that much is certain.”

Kid gave them a glare, flinching when another sharp pain in his side had him stumbling. Dammit, none of them looked any worse for the wear, and by the look of things, Kid did not only have to fight, he had to win against them too. Even if he tried to run off, he’d have to pass by Giriko and Mosquito to get to the exit.

Kid took a deep breath. Running away would be difficult but not impossible. He could run fast enough and the woods around Arachnophobia were thick. Kid could evade Giriko by losing him in the forest as the man had no other way of detecting him. Mosquito would be trickier, for he had limited Soul-sensing abilities, so Kid just had to hope he would be able to gain enough distance between them.

But that for the future. Right now, Kid had to go past them.

His hands hovered over his pocket, where Eibon’s orb was, before taking it out and clutching it tight. Kid had no idea what would happen if he broke it, but it couldn’t be worse than getting captured by the Clowns.

“Listen,” Kid began as a last-ditch attempt, “I can explain everything if you’d just stop attacking-!”

Giriko apparently wasn’t having any of it, lunging at Kid with a roar in a straight line. Kid’s first instinct was to panic and roll away but he held himself in place. Giriko always began with a right kick, letting the momentum carry forward and exposing his left side. Kid could take advantage of that.

Narrowing his eyes, Kid crouched, dodged Giriko’s chain and leg by side-stepping to the left and elbowed him in the side.

Giriko gasped at the unexpected attack and stumbled but didn’t show any signs of being seriously injured. Kid tried to make a run for it but next thing he knew Giriko grabbed him by the collar and pinned him down, a chain around his neck.

“How the hell did you do that?” Giriko growled.

“You always leave your left side open on your first attack,” Kid choked out and Giriko’s hold on his eased, his scowl turning into a disbelieving frown.

Kid used his distraction to push him away as the door was right here in front of him, he just had to make a dash for it-

Mosquito’s stinger pieced his leg and Kid tripped, just when Giriko’s chain lashed out and flew over him in a wide arc. Kid instinctively tried to get up, and just when he managed to steady himself on two legs, Giriko’s chain retracted.

The chain disappeared under Kid’s waist, followed by a sharp tearing pain.

\*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*/
“I didn’t mean to…” Giriko’s voice was the first thing Kid heard with his failing senses. He was face up on the floor, body feeling numb, fingers barely able to clutch Eibon’s orb.

“Shit…” came Giriko’s muffled voice, his face a blur like everything else.

Kid gasped for breath, blinking until his hazy vision became sharp. Blood trailed out of him, faint trickles from scratches and bruises, or at least it did so on the upper half. When Kid looked down at the rest of his body, he was an expanding pool of red forming around him, already reaching his midsection.

Kid couldn’t see his legs. He couldn't feel his legs.

There was a mass in the corner of his vision at the other edge of the blood pool, one Kid couldn’t quite comprehend initially. It was roughly cylindrical-shaped and mostly covered in a black cloth, though the flat end Kid could see was mostly red, its edges being a feint beige-

Torn skin and insides, Kid’s mind realised before coming to a complete stop. The black cloth was his trousers.

The mass was Kid's lower half, splayed a small but unreachable distance away. His lower abdomen and legs.

He had been cut in half. Giriko’s chain had gone under his skin, followed by a sharp pain…

Kid stayed frozen in place, afraid even the thought of movement would make his injuries worse, somehow. He was surprised he wasn’t in even more pain, but maybe the full impact hadn’t caught up with him yet.

In any case, this was it. Kid couldn’t move. He might also be dying, but since having his head cut off didn’t kill him, he supposed this wouldn’t too. Such knowledge didn’t bring him any comfort.

Voices came from around him. Giriko’s mixed in with Mosquito’s and both were overtaken by a heavy creaking sound of metal grinding against stone. Was it the sarcophagus Kid had seen earlier?

Eibon’s orb grew warm in his palm and Kid gripped it with his failing strength. It had remained unbroken. Kid had no idea what would happen if he broke it. He could get a burst of energy, powerful enough to heal him and allow him to escape. He could lose his mind. Both, or neither.

It didn’t matter now though. Kid had nothing left to lose.

Kid closed his eyes with a shuddering breath. He used the last of his strength to squeeze the orb, feeling cracks form along its surface.

The orb shattered in his hands and Kid screamed.

Kid’s soul expanded with an explosive force that should have rendered any other creature mercifully unconscious. Any pain coming from his body disappeared completely, as if his mind was no longer able to process physical pain. All of his senses sans his Soul Perception faded until they disappeared completely, and Kid was floating in a dark eternal void, the two pieces of his body being the only objects he could perceive.

The wind picked up around him, coalescing into a maelstrom of dark energy as skull-like shadows erupted from his form and merged with the wind, forming a black tornado. The teeth-like ends of the shadows embedded themselves on his shoulders, and though they pierced his clothing, his body was left unharmed as they lifted him up. Like a foreign observer, Kid saw his lower half dragged up to
him by the shadows, the two pieces connecting with a sickening sound. From what little flesh showed through the torn fabrics, he saw the skin mend itself back together, as if it had been never torn. Skin, muscle, bone and nerves regenerated, the latter sending newfound pulses of pain coursing through him as he slowly began to regain feeling.

The black tornado dissipated with a shockwave, Kid lurched up to his feet, pulled upright by the same force that hauled his lower half. A bright white light came from above him, their warmth and power radiating across his soul. Kid still couldn’t see, but his Soul Perception had never been sharper. A light purple and blue soul lay unconscious. His Soul Perception picked up another soul, a filthy scabby red, and before Kid could fully comprehend his disgust, the shadows had already lunged at it, ridding it of its mortal coil and dragging it closer to him. He raised a hand at the red soul, fingers outstretched to grasp it, when a wavelength manifested between it and Kid, sending them a distance away.

The intruding wavelength retreated back to its owner and Kid noticed two new souls. They were purple, pulsing with magic, one buzzing with interest and the other still in mute horror. Strange, foreign thoughts bubbled in his mind, half of them hissing in hear, the other growling in outrage. Kid’s own throat was caught halfway between a furious roar and a horrified scream.

*That Witch!*

There was a scream, *Arachne*’s mother’s scream and *DaEsAuTrHa* Kid was thrilled horrified as their his attack connected with her shoulder, tearing off skin, muscle, bone and sinew, but unfortunately fortunately that bitch survived mother was still alive…

The Wavelength manifested again, roughly arrow-shaped and Ki— the Grim Reaper was pushed backwards. Hi-Their soul pulsed with indignation, but they couldn’t move anymore, their arms sending off pain signals as two heavy chains wrapped themselves around them and dragged them further back.

Spikes dug at their back, embedding themselves into flesh. Their vision returned for a brief moment only to see a wall of spikes closing in on them, sending the same wave of pain of his back to his front, the ends digging into his stomach, limbs, neck and eyes as the sarcophagus closed with a resounding thud.

They-*Kid* spent a moment in the excruciating darkness before blissful unconsciousness came to him.

Chapter End Notes

How do you like that dismemberment, ayy

Comments are appreciated I guess lol
Giriko wasn’t quite sure what was happening. A couple of days before, the Boss had requested his and Mosquito’s presence in the middle of the night; unusual, but not unexpected after their scrape with those Academy bastards. As it was the same night Kid had come back, Giriko had thought she’d ask them to bolster security or something like that.

But the Boss hadn’t said any of that. She hadn’t said anything about Giriko being late or made any comments about him being in his boxers. Instead, she had stayed silent, and with every second that had passed the lump in Giriko’s throat had grown larger.

“Kid is gone,” she’d eventually whispered. “The thing that arrived here is Death, wearing his skin.”

At first, Giriko thought he had misheard. Then he thought she had been cracking some sort of joke. After that, he thought she was just being paranoid. Finally, though, he’d noticed her eyes; dry, but red and puffy.

Giriko’s first instinct had been to rush the room, chains whirling, and confirm that with his own two eyes. It was something he would have done, had Mosquito not gasped like a moron and asked Boss to explain; though it may have helped Giriko get a better picture and temporarily assuage his murderous rage. The Boss was way smarter than him in these matters and hearing her explain stuff had cleared up a few things for him. Sure Giriko knew all there was when it came to Golems and similar structures but the Boss’ magic prowess and her knowledge of such were way beyond him, and something he’d staked his life on multiple times in the past.

Yet despite the Boss’ explanation of her suspicions and the lead-up to her terrible discovery, something didn’t sit right with Giriko. Even if all the clues came together, Giriko couldn’t accept Kid was gone. Despite the Boss’ occasional babying and all that crap about etiquette Mosquito filled Kid’s head with, the boy had spunk in him. Giriko didn’t really know much about Death or the Kishin or all the other eldritch fuckery the Boss had found herself in, but if Death had been so weak as to require some sort of host, who was to say that Kid wasn’t still in there, somehow? Hell, best case scenario, if there was some sort of battle for control, what if Kid had ended up with some wicked Grim Reaper powers? Wouldn’t that be a riot, especially for those Academy fuckers?

So of course Giriko had rushed in, though with his own plan in mind. Yes, the Boss was right about such things, but Giriko wanted to see for himself so he held back; where he could have sliced and diced, he manoeuvred his chains just inches away from the target, methodically boxing them in…

When the kid had predicted his moves, Giriko had tried to wrap the chains around him and bring him close, maybe immobilise him and makes sure himself…
But then Mosquito, interfering asshole that he was, had gone and stung the kid and the chains flew over him and Giriko retracted them so he could set them up again, but the kid had recovered immediately and got up and…

“Lady Arachne!” Mosquito’s annoying nosy voice pierced his mind and Giriko blinked, the haze from his mind clearing. He had ended up on the floor somehow. He had probably stumbled while backing away from… whatever had happened. Even if it had been seconds later, the memory of that nightmarish maelstrom erupting out of the kid’s body felt far-away, as if his mind had tried to scrub it away.

Still, Giriko brought himself up to see Mosquito running towards the Boss, who had fallen from her throne and had fallen clumsily to the floor. Her forearm was mangled; flesh and bone poked through rips in the fabric, along with her wrist being covered in a black gooey substance.

Arachne came to with a groan, her eyes widening as she saw her arm. “Giriko!” came her voice, and as if lightning hit him, he sprung upright, “your chainsaw!”

Numbly, Giriko summoned his chains and they fell purposelessly on the floor. The Boss used her uninjured arm to grab one and wrapped it around her other upper arm while the black substance climbed up to her forearm.

“Pull them!” the Boss ordered him and once again tonight, Giriko hesitated.

“You wanna amputate yourself?!”

“Do it!” the Boss cut him off, her voice increasingly desperate. The substance had now reached her elbow and crawling further up. The lower parts had been completely encased in it, like a coat of paint-

“Giriko!” the Boss yelled at him and Giriko jerked, panicking and forcefully retracting his chain.

The squelch of flesh and Boss’ resulting scream would give him nightmares, compounding those he’d surely get from slicing the kid in half. Mosquito’s useless and distracting shrieks as he hurried to make a tourniquet grated against Giriko’s ears and he took a step back, footing unsteady.

He could only stare at the lump of flesh left behind, partially covered by the torn sleeve. The black substance continued its encroaching journey and the parts that had been covered before now caved in. A crack in the gooey layer opened and countless spiders hurried past it, dragging the carcasses of dead fellows in their exodus. Most of them fell moments later, their bodies collapsing and their legs pulling in before staying still forever. A few scattered made it a valiant distance but the black substance extended it tendrils and they were engulfed before being reduced to empty husks.

After the last spider let out a final spasm, the black substance lost its consistency, the goo turning into smoke. In the end, all that was left was a small pile of dead arachnids, further degrading until only dust was left behind.

“Milady…” Mosquito tentatively said as the Boss sat up. Her sleeves had been further torn to make tourniquets and cover the amputated area—already it was covered in blood with more dead spiders hanging from it.

“What…” Giriko let out, his voice hoarse, “what the hell was that?”

The Boss, face pale, regarded the small dust pile where her arm used to be with a scowl. “Grim Reaper's Wavelength, materialised…” she muttered through gasps, “Destroys anything it touches until there’s nothing left.”
Shit, so Giriko hadn’t imagined it, something had emerged from that damn abysmal whirlpool, something that had gone straight for the Boss’ heart and all Giriko had, all he could have done, was stare in horror…

“Medusa!” the Boss barked.

Giriko looked back to the darker reached of the throne room. The Elder’s soul stood on one side, while another bigger pile of dust had formed under it, the remains of its body. On the other end was Medusa; the Boss’ sister. Too nuts for Giriko’s tastes and not as brilliant. She had fallen backwards as if blown away by a wind. Her eyes had been wide, her lips were stretched halfway between a grin and a grimace.

Medusa blinked, and the manic expression was instantly replaced by a more restrained dread. “Yes?”

“You have him,” the Boss hissed. “Now get out of my sight.”

As Medusa scrambled upright, Giriko helped the Boss stand. Her frame was slumping, her face was too pale and she looked moments away from fainting.

As they left the throne room to head for the medical room, Giriko couldn’t help but glance back at the sealed sarcophagus. It stood still, chains wrapped around it tightly and sigils growing a dark purple while blood pooled at its bottom.

A small distance away, the small pile of dust was blown away by a barely perceptible breeze.

Liz was pretty sure she and Patty were being followed.

After Kid’s… warning, the two had reached the thankfully-empty kitchens and unceremoniously plopped themselves out the window and into the wilderness stretching around Baba Yaga castle.

By Liz’s limited knowledge of geography, they were somewhere on the east coast, in swamp country. The ground was made up of a shallow moss-covered layer of still water from which trees sprung up in a dense and claustrophobia-causing arrangement. Moisture clung on her skin, while the area buzzed with the sound of insects and the occasional frog. Most disturbingly, the entire area was covered in spiderwebs, stretching from tree to tree and absorbing what few rays of sunlight penetrated the thick foliage.

Careful not to disturb any of the spiderwebs, since Liz had a distinct feeling they may have something to do with Arachne’s shtick, she and Patty navigated through the thick forest, keeping the outer wall of Baba Yaga behind them.

“Where are we going, sis?” Patty asked.

Not wanting to show her growing fear in front of her younger sister, Liz faked a nonchalant shrug. “Somewhere safe.” Now, where exactly that safe place was, Liz was no idea. All she knew now was that Baba Yaga wasn’t it. All they had to do, all they could do now was navigate this lightless forest until they figured out what their next move was, besides fleeing their temporary safe heaven based on the word of a person they mostly-trusted…

Honestly, if it turned out that Kid was just being paranoid, Liz was going to skin him-

A slight lump on the ground a distance away from them moved, causing a ripple in the moss-covered water. Liz jumped in place -if there was one thing she hated besides humid dark forests where other
living things inside said forest-

The lump moved again, and Liz barely caught a grunt from it, muffled and restrained but very much human.

“Patty.” With a soft nudge, Patty transformed and Liz now had a gun she could shoot with if whatever that lump was tried to pull a fast one on them.

Slowly and with her finger on the trigger, Liz approached the lump, which was revealed to be a slumped human figure, partially covered with foliage. Was it supposed to be some sort of camouflage? It looked convincing from a distance, but the closer Liz the more inconsistencies she could find. Like the colour, where parts of the mossy green mixed with red as it trickled from the thick leaves and into the water. Blood.

“Your cover’s busted,” Liz said, keeping her distance and pointing Patty where she assumed the figure’s head was. Though it was worrying that another human was here, they were injured and were trying to hide.

Slowly, the figure unfurled and shed their camouflage, revealing a heavily bandaged woman. Her dreadlocked hair was matted, and whatever parts of her skin weren’t covered by bandages, were littered with bruises and healing cuts.

Liz narrowed her eyes at the woman as the latter slowly brought her arms up in surrender. “Looks like I’ve been found.”

Liz didn’t respond, trying to figure out what the stranger’s deal was. Was she also trying to escape Baba Yaga? Or maybe she was trying to infiltrate it? How had she gotten hurt?

“Looks like you’ve seen better days,” Liz finally said, figuring out her best bet was to gather more info.

The woman let out a dark chuckle. “So you’re not with them.”

Liz frowned. “Not with who?”

“Arachnophobia.”

Liz scoffed, squashing her discomfort under a cocky grin. “And you know that, how…?”

“We wouldn’t be talking like this,” the woman continued. It may have been Liz’s imagination, as the stranger’s mouth was covered by bandages, but there was a hint of a smile. “Which means you must be running away as well. Though guessing from your appearance, you weren’t a prisoner. A deserter then?”

Liz scowled. Damn. Whatever her deal was, she was good. “Who are you?”

“I can ask you the same thing-”

“Ok, you know what, let’s cut the bullshit,” Liz spoke up. “I don’t really care what your deal is, but I ain’t here to make friends, so tell me why I shouldn’t blast your brains all over that tree-”

“Do you know your way out of this swamp? Or the security measures preventing any escapees? Or deserters, for that matter,” the woman added as an afterthought.

Liz’s scowl deepened. Security measures? Shit was the entire swamp booby-trapped or something?
Maybe it had to do with the spiderwebs that were all over the place?

“…Guessing you were some kind of prisoner?” Liz eventually asked. She had mentioned prisoners, and her beat up appearance made Liz think she wasn’t an ally of Arachnophobia. “How’d you get out?”

The woman gave Liz a suspicious look, but the gun aimed at her head caused her to reconsider. “Guard was light. They were needed elsewhere, apparently.” She glanced up at the spiderwebs. “Whatever’s going on, people are distracted. Arachne too, or we would have already been caught.”

Liz tightened her grip to steady her shaking hand. Shit, so that meant Kid wasn’t being a paranoid little shit.

“We have a narrow window of opportunity. We should use that to get out of here instead of killing each other.” The woman paused, looking at the direction of Baba Yaga. She blinked rapidly and took in a steadying breath. “I will not die in this swamp.”

“Preach it,” Liz muttered under her breath. If anything, she liked the stranger’s perseverance. Plus her reasoning made sense. She sounded like she knew how to get out of this swamp too. “Still, who are you with?”

“…The Academy,” the woman said and Liz’s heart rate skyrocketed. The Academy? Shit, shit, shit-

“But I can’t go back now,” the woman continued, looking down, her fists clenched. “Sid…”

“Hey what’s with that attitude?” Liz asked with a scoff. “Didn’t you just say you aren’t gonna die in this swamp-?”

“Aren’t the Academy a bunch of bastards, sis?”

“Patty-”

“You’re a weapon?” the woman asked, eyes wide as if she was seeing Liz for the first time. “And you’re a Meister-?”

“Listen, I don’t know what your deal is, but I ain’t planning on dying any time soon.” Liz ignored the chill that ran up her spine as soon as she muttered that last part. “So uh, let’s…” damn, the words sounded foreign in her mouth, “work… together, and get out of here.” And after that Liz would put a bullet between her eyes as the last thing he wanted was to be in the Academy’s radar.

“…I’m Naigus,” the woman said after a few moments of hesitation and offered her hand.

“Liz, What do you say we get out of this swamp?” Liz said with a faked smile as she grabbed her arm and helped Naigus stand up. “Hell, when you get back to the Academy, make sure you put in a good word for us, ‘k?”

Like hell Liz would let that happen. Arachnophobia, Academy, she was done with all that bullshit. All Liz had to do now was survive by any means necessary.

…She still couldn’t feel her heartbeat.

Chapter End Notes
F for Arachne’s arm.

Comments are appreciated.
Judging from a sense of vertigo the moment he regained consciousness, Kid was upright.

That was about as much as he could make out about his environment; his vision and hearing were obstructed, while he couldn’t move a muscle, as he was covered from head to toe by… something. Restraints if he had to guess, ones made up of a strange mixture of leather and plastic that adhered and chaffed against his skin. The warm rubbery texture in contrast with its stiffness made Kid guess that layers upon layers of them had been applied on him.

Every inch of his skin was covered by them, including his eyes and mouth, so tight that his nose was painfully squashed. His neck was bound just as tight, preventing him not only from turning his head, but basically strangling him. His arms were pulled back against his back, also bound tight against his torso, where he felt a suffocating pressure at his sides as if his very ribs were digging into his lungs.

Kid’s first instinct was to jerk, but he immediately regretted his decision. The parts of him that hadn’t gone completely numb were in pain. His ankles in particular… he couldn’t see them but they felt broken. A constant thrum of pain came from them, seemingly moving on their own, only to be met with resistance.

Soon after most of the pain died down, though his ankles still hurt. Kid tried to relax his frame in case any of the restraints would give away, but none did. The constant pressure remained, but at least Kid could think again. Though the latter may not be as desirable, as the only thought that came up was that he had been…

He had been betrayed. Mothe-Arachne had made plans with the Kishin’s Clowns for his capture, and their attempt had been successful. Giriko and Mosquito had attacked him, and Kid had been… he had been hurt badly, so he broke Eibon’s orb…

Kid’s whole body seized, earning him another wave of pain, though it went unnoticed as he recalled that… power. As if he had taken his first proper breath where he had inhaled deeply and made himself dizzy; as if he could finally stretch after a long sleep, where he had done so until his muscles protested in pain; as if he could finally talk, where he has screamed his throat sore.

But that feeling was gone now. When before it had been like drowning in a torrent, Kid now felt like he was floating on an ocean’s still surface. The power lay dormant, as Kid could still feel its presence. He could sense it as it tried to stubbornly heal his ankles, coursing through his body, helping his strained circulation, sustaining him without the need for air or food or water. It was the only thing keeping him alive… though the latter term may be a bit misleading, considering what Kid now knew he was.
The Grim Reaper.

Of all the thoughts, theories and conflicting emotions, Kid’s biggest desire was to get some space to process this, some peace of mind to at least do some basic soul-searching even if it was to reassure himself that he hadn’t gone mad yet. Hell, Kid couldn’t even bother with considering the implications of his existence, he would be more than happy with simply being allowed to exist and figure out exactly what was going on with him. Yet now that he had been captured…

…Kid would have to persevere. He… There may be a window of opportunity of him to escape, there should be something that could improve his situation in any way. He couldn’t be stuck here like this forever. Could he?

What were the going to do to him? Who were his captors? Was he still in Arachnophobia, under mo-Arachne’s clutches? Had he been transported to somewhere else? To the Clown’s HQ? Or even in one of Medusa’s facilities?

Kid hated that he couldn’t make out his surroundings. He couldn’t see, his hearing was heavily obstructed, the only thing he touched were the restraints… the only clear sense Kid still had was his Soul Perception.

Perhaps if he activated I he could at least see what types of beings were close to him. Maybe he could identify his captors, or detect any other beings that were also imprisoned. It would be better than having no idea where he was…

The first thing Kid sensed with his Soul Perception was a red soul, a red, filthy, contaminated soul right in front of him, while his peripheral was filled with more red souls, each one viler than the other-

Kid instinctually jerked back, shutting his Soul Perception, not wanting to see those red hues all around him. His reaction was stubborn and childish, like a kid hiding under their bedsheets during a storm, but Kid couldn’t bear that his only connection to the real world was the visage of those monsters.

Due to his sheer disgust, the resulting pain from his motion became secondary. His joints hurt though, feeling his knuckles almost breaking under the overwhelming pressure.

The sound of muffled laughter managed to pierce the restrains, more reverberation than actual sound. “The more you struggle…” came a barely-audible voice, “…tighter they’ll become.”

Kid gritted his teeth, not being able to move any other way. The voice must have belonged to the Kishin Egg in front of him, the one that had been so awfully close.

Kid tried to lean back, but again found himself unable of any meaningful movement; there must have been something else holding him in place. Perhaps there was some sort of pole or something used as a framework for the restrains, it wasn’t as if Kid could actually see anything-

“I want to see it one more time…” the voice came again, and Kid was getting the impression that the Egg was talking to itself.

Some restrains around his face were undone, exposing his skin against warm humid air. Kid regained a bit of his hearing as some of the layers covering his ears were removed. However, his eyes and mouth were still covered; he could still only detect the… being before him with Soul Perception.

Something touched the crane of his neck, something leathery and calloused. Kid tried to reel back, to no avail.
“My, would you look at that.”

The vile finger trailed up, skipping the restraints and settling at his chin before finally moving up at his forehead. Kid wanted to flinch but the bindings prevented him from moving even an inch. All he could do was mentally shudder.

“The resemblance is uncanny,” the Egg continued in a hum. “More than any coincidence can explain.”

What the hell was it talking about? Resemblance to what? To whom? Was there some sign that he was a Grim Reaper that he’d missed? All they knew about the Grim Reaper’s form was that it was a black form with a skull for a face and last time Kid checked, though wane, his face wasn't exactly made of bone.

The restraints on the top of Kid’s head were slowly removed, freeing his hair. “If it wasn't for the lines, I'd have you mistaken for Him.”

His mouth was also freed, and Kid would have let out a string of curses, but he simply didn’t have any air left in his lungs, let alone his strangled throat. Still, with his face no longer pressed and stuck in place, Kid’s expression stretched into a scowl as the restrains on his eyes was removed.

“Despite the colour, the eyes too…” The finger trailed down to the side of his eye and Kid’s gaze immediately landed on it, a long sinewy appendage with overgrown nails and leathery skin. “To think that I, one of the blessed few who were graced with His visage, would be able to see it again, even as an imitation…”

When the finger finally pulled back, Kid switched his gaze to its abominable owner.

As he had expected, the thing in front of him was more monster than human; Kid would have called it a feral beast, but that would be an insult to feral beasts, for at least they had the good sense to leave souls untouched. Its hunched form covered under layers of heavy robes decorated with the Kishin’s eye left most of its actual body up to Kid’s imagination.

“Isn’t that ironic, Grim Reaper?”

Its hand gently cupped Kid’s chin and his scowl faltered.

“You have the same face as the late Lord Asura.”

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Arachne woke up with a jolt and immediately double over as a wave of pain washed over her. She fell back on her bed and took a deep studying breath.

Slowly, Arachne got up, her left hand hovering over her right upper arm, right where the limb terminated to nothing.

Stupid thing. There was more pain now than when it had been cut off. Or maybe that was because when it been cut off it had been but one of the many things Arachne’s mind had been preoccupied with. In any case, it hurt.

Well, at least the damage wouldn’t be permanent. Probably.

The problem wasn’t so much as regrowing per se; Arachne’s spiders could multiply at an astounding rate. However, getting them to reform into specific parts of her human body had always been a
hurdle and a reason she preferred not to shapeshift. Getting them to rebuild the better part of an arm, essentially assigning each one a position and a pattern in which their bodies would change to muscle, bone, fat and ligament…

Well, it was a good thing that Arachne was functionally immortal. And that her mornings were free.

Arachne rolled up her sleeve until she could see the end of the stump and slowly removed the bandage. It was an ugly wound, lopsided, and with the skin unevenly torn; even with her best potions and magic there were still flaps of skin hanging off, while parts of it still bled, as if had been dragged over uneven asphalt. Arachnophobia’s medics strongly advised that they treat the wound, sealing it properly and shaping the muscles to make a prosthesis fit, but Arachne rejected their suggestions. Removing any more issue would only hamper its eventual regrowth. As for a prosthetic… while there was the ability to create an almost-life like artificial limb, Arachne didn’t want it. It would be cowardly to pretend her arm had never been cut off, that the Grim Reaper hadn’t managed to nick her, that Kid hadn’t been…

Putting such thoughts aside, Arachne focused on the stump. A small spider emerged from under her robes, where countless other lay in wait.

Moving slowly and carefully as of balancing on a web on a windy day, her spider settler on one of the open wounds, tucking in its legs. Arachne closed her eyes, visualising the tissue that it would contribute too, the blood vessels and layers of epidermis and muscle…

Arachne opened her eyes to see a tiny patch of tissue where the spider had been. Another spider put in place, another tiny part of her arm successfully restored.

Well, mostly successful. There was a patch of skin pointing inwards where they shouldn’t be. She’d have to get a scalpel later and remove it. It would be simpler than unforming and reforming her spider.

There was a soft knock on her door. Satisfied with her progress, Arachne redressed her wound.

“Come in.”

Mosquito entered, giving her a deep bow. “Milady, you have a visitor.”

Arachne rolled her sleeve over the bandage and looked down at Mosquito with a frown. A visitor? Was it one of the Clowns? Had they already prepared a report?

“It is your sister, milady,”

Arachne didn’t need to be told which sister it was. There was only one of them who would visit her like this.

“Medusa,” Arachne spoke up before Mosquito could continue.

Right on cue, Medusa appeared at the doorway. Her appearance was as Arachne had expected; nothing like the jittery wreck that had left when Death had been captured.

“Sister,” Medusa said with a sickly sweet voice, all coated with fake concern. “Apologies for disturbing your… recovery-”

“What do you want?” Arachne cut her off. Last thing she wanted was Medusa’s faked pity, especially when said pity implied weakness. Arachne was willing to bet that if Medusa lost an arm, that damage would be permanent. So yes she may appear weak now, but that would only make it more satisfying when she would finally fully regrow her arm.
Still smiling but with slightly narrowed eyes, Medusa glanced at Mosquito. “May we talk in private?”

Mosquito didn’t move, Arachne noted with satisfaction. Despite her attitude, Medusa held no sway here.

But in any case, Arachne might as well humour Medusa’s request. Doing otherwise would imply she was still in a serious state, or that she was too distraught to hold simple conversation. None of those would be allowed to be true for Arachne.

Arachne gracefully stood up, moving as if she’d never lost an arm. It was harder said than done, surprising how a simple arm affected her balance and coordination, but Arachne had practiced; Her duties as Arachnophobia’s leader demanded she did so.

“You may leave us Mosquito,” Arachne said with a nonchalant wave.

To her greater satisfaction, Mosquito left immediately, closing the door behind him; no concerned words, expression or look. He knew what the stakes were.

Arachne loaded at Medusa expectantly; her sister’s eyes were glued to the door, narrowed. She was thinking something. Calculating, as always.

After a few more moments, Medusa reached for the handle and opened the door. "Walk with me, sister."

Arachne held back a frown. That was strange. Medusa knew better than to continue playing games when Arachne wasn’t in a good mood. But again, she was the eldest; she had to have the good grace of humouring her younger siblings.

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Their footsteps echoed the empty hallways of Baba Yaga. Most of her people were either rebuilding the exterior from the Academy’s assault, to routing out any strugglers across the territories.

It was supposedly a risky move, leaving Arachnophobia exposed after a major attack. But the Academy’s HQ had been razed down and Baba Yaga had suffered extensive damage. Better to focus on rebuilding than an attack that would never come. And technically there hadn’t been any external threat yet, since infiltration wouldn’t have been-

Arachne bit her tongue and focused on the empty hallway ahead. Normally, she appreciated having such areas to herself. The silence gave her time to think. Of course more often than not said tranquillity would be broken by Mosquito’s quiet yet distinctive presence, Giriko’s yells, or Kid -he used to ran at Arachne to Mosquito’s annoyance-

Arachne bit her tongue again and blinked the excessive moisture that gathered in her eyes. Must have been the dust. Yes, she should remind Mosquito not to slack when it came to keeping the base clean-

"Have you seen Asura's face?" Medusa asked.

Arachne stopped dead in her tracks but kept her expression neutral. What sort of question was that? "No. They were too scared to show anyone."

“I see,” Medusa muttered, not bothering to look at Arachne. “As you are aware, I am cooperating with the Clowns concerning the… Grim Reaper.”
Arachne narrowed her eyes at Medusa. What did Asura have to do with any of the recent events? Had the Clowns gone on a bender again?

Medusa reached to one of her pockets and took out a carefully folded paper. “One of the elder ones made a comment that I couldn’t help but investigate—”

“What’s that?” Arachne asked as Medusa unfolded the paper. It was a hastily-sketched portrait, though she couldn’t see it fully.

“A simple sketch. One I requested after some peculiar comments.”

Medusa offered the sketch to Arachne and she carefully took it, holding it in a distance as she fully unfolded it. There were some rumours about what even a Clown’s sketch could do to someone’s mind.

Arachne thought such rumours were true when she finally looked over the sketch, realising it was supposed to depict the Kishin itself. Arachne could make out its characteristic appearance from the red sweater, the scarf, the bandages, the black hair with peculiar eye-like white markings…

Her grip faltered but quickly strengthened, to the point where she crinkled the paper. Her eyes trailed over the clothing, redundant in her opinion and settled on a face, one that could almost pass as human had not been for that blood red third eye.

It was a face identical to Kid’s.

…Arachne had never seen Asura’s face. It had always been covered up by bandages and scarfs, always hidden as if he had been afraid of his own reflection. Arachne didn’t care enough to speculate its appearance, thinking it was secondary to everything else the Kishin had to offer, and she thought she had been right. She thought it and Death had destroyed each other, but that had turned out to be a lie and why did Asura look like Kid?

"Notice any similarities?” came Medusa’s voice, as Arachne unable to take her eyes off the sketch.

"I…” Arachne faltered, "I don’t understand."

It didn’t make sense. Did Kid have some relation to Asura? It couldn’t be, he had reacted badly to anything related to soul eating; the most strenuous connection she couldn’t make would be with Kid’s persisting obsession about balance and symmetry, but that came nowhere close to the sheer Madness the Kishin represented.

And why the Kishin of all beings? First Death, now Asura? If there was something she’d missed about Kid and his relationship to Asura, then it would only complicate things, like a Gordian knot that could twist itself into more incomprehensible knots…

"Me too unfortunately.” Medusa’s words were like a lighthouse in a storm, anchoring her back to reality. Arachne’s mind cleared, only to be clouded by another wave of questions.

Besides the red flags raised by the similarity, there was another line of enquiry Arachne hadn’t addressed. Why did Medusa decide to show this to Arachne? Her younger sister wouldn’t show such… bizarre material for no reason. Annoying or not, Medusa knew how to manipulate people and weight the risks and benefits of each move. There were different outcomes of her action and Medusa always reassured herself that she would come out on top of each one.

What was Medusa hoping to gain from this? Confuse Arachne? There was no reason she’d do that besides pure sadism and though Arachne didn’t rule it out of a possibility, it didn’t counterbalance
the vital info she’d just given away.

Did Medusa think Arachne purposefully took Kid in and that by exposing her ruse, Arachne would divulge some non-existent secret plan? But Arachne had no idea of the similarity...

Unless…

"Oh well," Medusa continued after Arachne didn’t respond. “I suppose it doesn't matter now-"

“What an elaborate deception,” Arachne cut her off, neatly folding the paper and handing it back to Medusa. The final scenario she had thought of explained everything. Or at least it would explain everything as far as Medusa was concerned.

Medusa blinked. “Deception? The sketch-”

“Was created by the Clowns,” Arachne said with a sigh, as if lecturing a child. “This is not a photograph or anything more concrete. Simply an interpretation of an unearthly being by a broken mind. I’m sure they took some… creative liberties, especially after their recent triumph.”

For all Arachne knew that was as true as all the other theories she had come with. Medusa didn’t need to know that however.

As Medusa got back the sketch she unfolded and looked over it again, this time with a flicker of doubt.

Success.

“Careful now, dear sister,” Arachne continued with a fake good-natured smile. The Clowns have a tendency of messing with people’s minds. You wouldn’t want to succumb to their tricks now, would you?”

Despite her words Arachne couldn’t help but glance at the painfully familiar sketch.

Chapter End Notes

Comments are appreciated.
“We’re here,” Naigus said and stopped.

Liz raised an eyebrow at the structure before her. It looked like an abandoned cabin, one ready to collapse at any moment. She was expecting something more like an underground bunker, or something equally secretive. Wasn’t the Academy supposed to be some big deal in underground circles?

“Huh. Not much of an HQ, is there?”

Naigus turned back and her one visible eye gave Liz a half-hearted glare. “It’s not, this was where we…” She cut herself off and rubbed her brow. “Look, I’ve got places to be. I’m sure you do too-”

“It is okay, Liz will figure it out. They were on a hill, and Liz could make out the lights of a village further down. Maybe they could rob a dude or two, or a store if the people there weren’t gun-nuts. Back to familiar territory-

“There should be food inside,” Naigus spoke up.

Patty let out a whoop, but Liz frowned at the offer. “Why so generous?”

“Simply returning the favour,” Naigus said before turning away. “I can’t afford to be indebted, so take it or leave it.”

Liz’s frown deepened. On one hand, offers of help were always suspicious. But, the three of them had made it out of the swamp and had helped each other out. Naigus was an expert when it came to navigating the area, and Liz had helped her out when exhaustion caught up to her and she became too weak to walk; Liz had even carried the woman across a riverbed they’d crossed, since the running water irritated her wounds.

…You know what, Liz wasn’t going to turn down free food, not when Patty was hungry. Plus, Naigus wasn’t the worst person to have around probably because she was a competent, no-nonsense woman who focused surviving than making snarky remarks. Nothing like Kid-

“Lead the way then,” Liz said with a nonchalant shrug.
Not bothering with a response, Naigus opened the creaky door, letting up clouds of dust. She walked past the entrance and into the hut, littered with half-broken furniture. When Liz was about to protest that this place didn’t seem to be habitable, let alone have any food, Naigus moved a stack of wood away, revealing a trap door.

Naigus wordlessly pulled the trapdoor open, propping it up in such a way as to cause the wood pile to collapse when she closed it. She jumped inside, Liz and Patty following soon after. Liz closed the tap door and heard the sound of wood collapsing on top of it.

Once inside the musky basement, Liz followed Naigus’ vague shape -Liz had to blink several times to get her eyes to adjust, ever since waking up in the Academy dungeon her vision always took longer to adjust- as she hugged a wall and walked further in the darkness. Naigus reached a dead-end and paused, fiddling with a seemingly impenetrable wooden door. After a few seconds, the wall creaked and moved away from wall revealing another lightless hallway.

Naigus kept walking through the hallway, reaching another door. She fiddled with the lock again, which had a strange combination mechanism. When the door opened, their eyes were assaulted with bright electric light.

“Mira-?” came a stranger’s voice, as Liz entered the brightly lit room, covering her eyes until they slowly adjusted. “Wait, who are you two?”

“They’re with me,” came Naigus’ voice.

“Mira!” came another voice. “Oh, you’re alive-!”

When Liz’s eyes finally stopped having blind spots, she saw three people, the blonde one hugging Naigus while the other two congregated around her.

“Marie?” came Naigus’ befuddled voice as she looked down at the woman hugging her before turning to the redhead and the bespectacled woman. “Spirit, Azusa? Why are you all here?”

Their faces darkened.

“Arachnophobia,” Azusa began, “or rather-”

“It’s a long story,” Marie began with a strained smile. “After you and…We managed to storm Arachnophobia but suddenly everyone inside collapsed. We weren’t sure what had happened, so we grabbed as many people as we could and left.” Her expression fell. “We’re so sorry we couldn’t get to you or Sid-”

“Sid’s long dead and Arachnophobia’s underground prisons are maze-like,” Naigus coolly said as she crossed her arms. “I understand.”

Marie covered her mouth while Spirit’s frown deepened at Naigus’ words. Only Azusa remained mostly unaffected.

“Sid’s…” Marie began, “we’re so sorry-!”

“There’s no point in wallowing,” Naigus cut her off, though Liz spied her grip tighten at the mention of ‘Sid’.

Huh. Wouldn’t be the first one to lose people in this mess, especially if they were from the Academy.

“We managed to capture Arachne,” Spirit spoke up. “We had her, right in our grasp-”
“Arachne herself?!” Naigus cut them off. “Why wasn’t she immediately executed-?!”

“Arthur thought she had information about Death, so we were supposed to interrogate her, then kill her,” Azusa explained in a blank tone. “And she wasn’t the only one we pulled out…”

Spirit’s frown turned into a scowl while Marie buried her face in her hands. “We did a terrible thing…”

“It wasn’t us,” Spirit insisted, “we tried to help, what Arthur did-”

“We even told him everything would be ok…”

Liz and Patty sat at the back of the room. Patty immediately started going to town on the food supplies while Liz sat back, not wanting to be involved in whatever soap opera was going on. At least she was learning a bit more about what on Earth was happening in the Academy while she escaped.

“What are you talking about?” Naigus asked, causing the others to go silent. “How did Arachne escape?”

Spirit Azusa and Marie looked at each other.

After a few seconds, Marie spoke up while fiddling with her hands; “Arachne’s child was also among our prisoners.”

Liz raised an eyebrow. So that explained how Kid had ended up in the Academy. Now the next question was why he’d been in the dungeon and why that guard they’d killed thought he was seeing a ghost.

“She has a child?” Naigus asked again.

“She obviously kept his existence hidden to the outside world,” Azusa said. “It’s not hard to imagine why.”

“He was just a boy,” Marie continued. “We thought he should have been left alone, but Arthur disagreed. We tried to help him escape but…” She shook her head. “It all went terribly wrong.”

Spirit snorted. “Let’s just say that after Arachne broke out, what she did to the Academy wasn’t so much retaliation as it was revenge.”

“…Oh,” Naigus let out after a few seconds. “I can imagine.”

Liz frowned. These guys seemed to implied that Kid had been killed, but Liz had met him. Did they not know he was still alive…?

No, Liz should just keep her trap shut, wait until Patty ate her meal and then get out and forget she ever met these people.

“Who made it out?” Naigus asked.

Azusa sighed. “We don’t know but most… Besides us, the only other people here are Maka and Soul.” She gestured to the other side of the room, leading to another hallway. “They’re resting now.”

Naigus blinked, looking between them aghast. “It’s just you?”

Marie nodded. “Tezca was with us but we split up while escaping. He hasn’t contacted us, so we
A loud crashing sound from the hallway leading to the basement caused everyone to jump. Spirit and Marie headed to the entrance with Azusa and Naigus behind them. Liz grabbed Patty and scuttled further in the back, eyeing the hallway leading to other rooms. If there was an intruder, maybe the others could distract them long enough until Liz and Patty got the hell out-

The cashing sounds subsided and were soon followed by reverberating rhythmic cranks, as if someone was winding up the world’s largest screw. Strangely enough, Marie, followed by Stein and Azusa, relaxed upon hearing the latter sound.

The entrance door opened and a rugged man came through; his shoes dragged across the floor, only gathering up more dust which settled on his stitched-up clothing. There was a giant screw seemingly bolted to his head, the origin of the strange cranking sound.

“Stein?!” Spirit yelled.

“You’re already here,” the man said, not bothering to look at them as he kept turning the screw in his head. “Good, no risk of—”

Marie rushed to his side. “Stein! You look exhausted, what’s—”

“Not much time, have to leave immediately. Couldn’t be intercepted so I couldn’t risk a transmission, but seeing as you are all here…” Stein paused, lifting his head and looking at each of them. His eyes lingered a bit longer on Liz and Patty, but he soon glanced back to the four. “Did we organise a reunion I forgot about? Never mind—”

Spirit made several false starts. “Where have you been?!?”

“The Clowns have Death,” Stein spoke over him, causing everyone to pause.

Liz frowned. The Clowns? Didn’t Arachnophobia work with the Clowns?

“Happened just the other day,” Stein continued, ignoring the sudden silence. “A party sent out by the Clowns with Medusa herself arrived at Arachnophobia. They returned to their base claiming they’d captured the Grim Reaper.”

Liz bit her tongue to stop her from speaking out. Shit, that must have been Kid. He wasn’t being paranoid, but apparently he hadn’t managed to make it out.

Shit.

…Should Liz say something?

“Stein,” Marie spoke up. “What are you on about- how do you know this? After our assault at Arachnophobia I dropped you by a medic but you just disappeared—”

Stein glanced around the room, his eyes landing on Liz and Patty again.

“They helped me escape from Arachnophobia,” Naigus spoke up. “They’re as safe as can be.”

Stein kept staring at Liz, ad a shudder went up her spine. She huddled closer to patty, grabbing her hand. While Patty kept eating, she also did inch closer to Liz, ready to transform at a moment’s notice.

With a blink, Stein broke his gaze, walked to one of the chairs and collapsed on it. “I am working for
Medusa,” he let out in a long exhale.

The resulting silence felt the precursor to a murder.

“As a spy,” Stein continued, removing his glasses and rubbing his eyes. “So you can stop coming up with ways to kill me, Naigus-”

“A spy?” Spirit repeated. “Why, when-?”

“I woke up shortly after you left me at the medic tent,” Stein said and twisted the screw on his head again. “And first thing I saw was a snake travelling up my arm.”

“Medusa,” Marie interjected.

Stein nodded. “She said she’d had her eye on me a while now. Said I was wasting my potential, strangling my creativity, while working for the Academy. Asked me to defect.” He grinned. “Of course I said yes.”

Spirit crossed his arms. “You’re not filling me with confidence Stein.”

“Was I supposed to say no and end up bleeding out from a cut throat?” Stein calmly asked, causing Spirit to flinch.

“So all this time you’ve been working with Medusa?” Azusa asked with narrowed eyes.

“But as a spy, right?” Marie quickly added.

Stein reached for his screw and gave it another twist. “Of course.”

Spirit frowned at Stein’s gesture.

“I’ve kept up with what’s happened,” Stein continued. “I’m… glad you are still alive, but we don’t have time to waste on reunions-”

“Right, you said that the Clowns have Death,” Spirit said with a long-suffering sigh. “Are you sure you didn’t go mad or something? Or maybe they went even more mad-?”

“Medusa wants me to oversee her side of the operation,” Stein cut him off.

Marie gulped. “What operation?”

“Of ‘dealing’ with Death,” Stein answered. “If it only had been up to the Clowns, Death would have been ripped apart by now. Medusa is the only reason they haven’t done so, because she has... plans. I’m not sure what they are, and I’m nowhere close to getting the full picture unless I take up the post-” Stein glanced at Liz and Patty again. “Who are you again?”

“They’re with me,” Naigus repeated. “They helped me get out of the swamp.” Though her words were the same, the intonation behind them had changed; it was less assuring than before.

Liz glanced at Patty, who was now scarfing down a sandwich. They really should get out of here, what if one of them recognised her or her sister-?

“What was your role in Arachnophobia?” Stein asked, sitting up to face them.

“Role-? Hey, I was there for like a few days at most-” Liz cut herself off when Stein narrowed his eyes, realising that only made her sound more suspicious. “Listen, I don’t wanna get involved with
whatever eldritch bullshit you got going on, I’ve been dealing with enough of this shit myself already-"

“Everyone please,” Marie spoke up, giving Stein a stern look. “They’re kids too. They shouldn’t be involved in this…” She sighed before turning to Liz and Patty with a kind expression. “We need to talk in private. Do you mind going to one of the back rooms?”

Liz immediately stood up taking Patty by the hand. Any excuse to get out of there would be more than welcome.

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“It’s just for a while, it’s been a long day for us kids… Make sure you get plenty of rest and let me know if you need anything…” Marie babbled on as Liz and Patty were escorted to a spacious but windowless room. In it was a simple bunk bed, an empty box and a dinky wooden stool. A naked bulb bathed everything in a faint orange tint.

It felt like a prison cell to Liz. They’d have to find a way to escape this place as soon as possible-

“Hey nice lady, can I keep this sandwich for later?” Patty asked, showing Marie her half-eaten meal.

“Sure thing dear,” the woman responded with a smile.

“Thanks!” Patty exclaimed and waved goodbye, with Marie reciprocating the gesture as she left the room and closed the door behind her.

After the sound of Marie’s footsteps dissipated, Patty’s grin turned feral. “Heh, sucker.” She unbuttoned her jacket and packets of sandwiches and food fell out. “Look at all this loot sis. We’re gonna have food for days! Oh, and you haven’t eaten too!” She dug through the packets and handed one to Liz. “Here, have a sandwich!”

“No thanks Patty,” Liz tiredly said as she sat on the bunk bed. “I’m not feeling hungry.”

Patty pouted. “But you haven’t eaten anything all day, sis-”

“And she won’t feel the need to eat anytime soon,” came a third voice from a dark corner of the room.

With a yelp, Liz reached out to Patty who transformed immediately. She scrambled to the door, keeping her gun pointed at the corner where the voice had come from -and why was that corner so dark, the lightbulb not that shitty-

The shadows melted away, revealing a tan tattooed man nonchalantly leaning against the wall. Liz’s grip trembled at the familiar face.

Noah.

“So,” Liz forced out, somehow managing to keep her voice even, “you’re working with the Academy now, fucker-?!"

“Shut up,” Noah said in a blank tone. “I come bearing news and all that-”

“What’s that supposed to mean-?!”

“It’s time for you to help your master escape the Clowns’ clutches,” Noah continued in a bored tone, “and so on so forth, can’t believe Eibon ordered me to recite this shit to you-“
Liz’s grip on Patty tightened. “That Eibon freak sent you?!”

“A bit slow, aren’t you?” Noah shot back nonplussed.

“Fuck off, I’m not some dog you can order around-!”

Noah shrugged. “Fine.”

Liz pulled down Patty, more out of surprise than reassurance. “Wait, that’s it?”

Noah shrugged again. “I was simply ordered to tell you something, not to convince you, so I don’t have any reason to care.” A small smile manifested on his previously bored face. “And it’ll be interesting to see you’ll fare.”

Liz felt a pit form in her stomach. “The hell’s that supposed to mean-?”

“Nothing’s gonna happen to sis cuz she’s the strongest-!”

Noah’s grin only grew wider as the pit in Liz’s stomach expanded. She lowered Patty completely, causing her young sister to transform back into her human form.

“Patty…” Liz hated manipulating Patty like this but she had an inkling about what Noah was implying… “Hey, how about you go explore the place?” She continued in a faked cheered tone. “Don’t worry about this jackass, he’s just about to leave,” she gestured at Noah as he rolled his eyes. “I’m sure there’s some neat stuff laying around, just like those sandwiches you got.”

Patty looked between Noah and Liz until settling on the later. “Like a treasure hunt?”

“Yeah, exactly.” Liz faked a yawn and stretched. “Plus, your big sis is tired…”

“Ok! Oh, and make sure you eat plenty before you take a nap sis!” With an excited nod, Patty left the room with a hop in her step. “Oh,” she stopped again and turned to Noah. “And-you-better-leave-mister-cuz-my-sis-is-tired-and-if-I-see-you-in-here-again-we’re-gonna-kill-you!” she said in one breath and threw her hands in the air.

Liz watched Patty depart with a smile that morphed to a scowl as she turned to face Noah. “Now what was all that shit you were on about ‘faring’? I said don’t wanna be involved in your bullshit-”

“You haven’t realised it yet?”

Liz’s scowl deepened. “Realised what?”

Noah leaned in to Liz. “If the Grim Reaper goes bye-bye, so will you.”

Liz tried to put on a brave face and pretend she didn’t understand what Noah had just said, she truly did. She wanted nothing more to believe that the the man… whatever he was, was just some stark raving lunatic who Liz could shoot in her head and be done with. But…

All the things that were off. Her paling skin, the way her senses had numbed, the lack of hunger or thirst, Patty complaining her big sis was colder than usual, a memory of wet breathlessness-

“You’re… “Liz’s voice cracked, “you’re lying-”

“You’re free to think that,” Noah calmly cut her off. “In any case, I was always curious about the degradation process of a zombie-”
“Fuck off!” Liz yelled as she stood up. “Get the hell out of here or I’m gonna call in all the Academy goons in and they’re gonna slice your ass like an onion-!”

Noah let out an amused snort. Behind him, the shadows manifested again, occasionally letting out a purple spark. Probably a portal or some shit like that. “Again I’m only here because my… master ordered me too. My role here is that of a simple messenger…”

Liz grabbed a sandwich pack, crushing it in her grip.

“Get the Grim Reaper out of the Clown’s clutches if you care about your well-being,” Noah repeated as he stepped into the portal, giving Liz one last amused look. “But I’m interested in the outcome either way-”

With a yell, Liz threw the packet to Noah but he was already gone. The packet hit the wall with a sad splotch and slid down miserably.

Liz let out a long exhale and collapsed into a ball. When was the last time she’d eaten? The last time she’d slept? The last time she hadn’t felt a stranger in her own body-?

A cheerful hum came from outside the room. As if electrified, Liz stood ramrod straight, wiping the tears from her eyes and slapping her face for good measure.

The door opened and Patty’s bubbly face appeared through. “Heya, sis!” she exclaimed as Liz smiled back. “Aw, is the creepy guy gone? I wanted to give him a good beating-”

Before she could stop herself, Liz reached out and hugged Patty tightly. Patty giggled and embraced back. Her sister’s grip was also tight, and she murmured something inaudible.

“Did you say something?” Liz asked.

“Nothing,” Patty murmured, her voice coming out muffled as she squashed her face against Liz’s frame. “I’m just glad you’re here, sis.”

Liz rapidly blinked to stop the tears from coming again. “Me too. And I ain’t going nowhere any time soon, you hear?”

Patty giggled. “Where would you go, silly? And besides, I’d come with you!”

Liz wanted to reply that Patty shouldn’t say such things, but stopped herself just in time. She couldn’t have known of the implications.

Slowly disengaging from the hug, Liz stood up and stretched. Just like before her body was a bit too slow to respond to what she wanted it to do; an observation she’d tried to deny up until now.

“Huh, are we leaving already?” Patty asked. “Oh, gotta pack all the sandwiches back-”

“No,” Liz said, causing Patty to pause and look up at her. “We, I have to stay. There’s… something I need to do.” Liz turned to Patty wit a heavy heart. She couldn’t ask her sister to take part in this insane mess she’d gotten herself into. “But it’s gonna be dangerous and-”

“Of course I’m gonna stay silly,” Patty said before Liz could finish and engulfed her in another tight hug. “You’re my sis, we stick together.”

Liz let out a bitter laugh. “Come hell or high water?”

“Come hell and high water!” Patty exclaimed.
Chapter End Notes

Comments are appreciated.
Kid tensed as he sensed a soul approach him, surprised his Soul Perception picked up a potential visitor. Usually, his vision would be swamped by Kishin Eggs, their souls just at arm’s length, making the fact that he couldn’t move only more excruciatingly frustrating. Even when there weren’t any nearby, Kid would sense them as they were spread across the area he was in, roaming freely. Sometimes they were visited by Witches, ones whose souls were too far way for Kid to distinguish. Other times Kid would sense a blue soul, only for it to disappear, probably eaten…

So, the same way that, people’s eyes would dart away from a rotting corpse after staring for far too long, Kid kept his Soul Perception inactive.

Extinguishing his only fully working sense, however, only cut off Kid further from the real world, and the only thing Kid could do was think. His imagination ran wild with what few clues he had, concocting wild theories about his capture, each more terrifying than the other, a curse by itself. His only other option was to try and fall asleep, a failed venture so far. Ever since breaking Eibon’s orb and arriving here, he’d never managed to do so. Every time he did clear any lingering thoughts which were too unnerving for him to relax, he was paid a visit.

…They would undo his restraints piecemeal, depending on what part of him they wanted to access. His eyes always remained covered, a vain attempt at hiding their identity, as if Kid couldn't peer into their disgustingly scabby red souls.

Sometimes they would just inflict a gash by his side and wait often leaving the knife in so the wound wouldn’t heal. Something cold and smooth would be placed against the skin lower from the wound. Kid’s best bet would be that they were harvesting his blood.

Throughout it all, Kid had learned to keep his mouth shut. Whenever he screamed or cried out his torture would become worse; apparently, his screams were motivational for the Clowns. Not just that, but they’d pick on any other signs of struggle or even mild discomfort too.

So, Kid would bite his tongue so he wouldn’t cry out, blink to keep the tears at bay and tense his muscles so they wouldn’t spasm. He would scowl whenever they dared unveil his face and curse them whenever he’d gathered the wits to talk. Nothing to give those bastards the satisfaction.

Worst of all though wasn’t the pain, or the lengths Kid had to go to so he’d avoid it. No, the long stretches of silence and inactivity, where Kid would recover, were unnerving by their stillness, made even worse about the occasional whispers he’d catch about plans and observations. He didn’t know what purpose his capture and continued existence served; were the Clowns unable to fully dispose of him? Did they have plans or designs that involved the Grim Reaper? Maybe the Clowns wanted to kill him, but were stopped by pressure by Arachno-
Kid could put on a brave face, but deep down he was **terrified**.

The red soul approaching him was joined by another, and the two came even closer, around what Kid estimated was the border to his chamber. They came by his side and Kid tensed as he felt them reach out at his back, where his hands were bound.

His hands were freed at the wrist. Kid flexed his fingers reflexively, though he would probably regret this newfound feeling in a bit. The last time they released his hands they’d removed his fingernails and Kid had been glad for the tight restraint on his mouth muffling most sounds come off him as he may have driven himself deaf by the way he has screamed his throat sore.

One of the Eggs left the room, and Kid picked up another newcomer.

A Witch.

Sensing a Witch’s soul always filled Kid with anxious energy ever since being brought here. Earlier in his capture Kid had held hope that Moth-Ararrahne would come. So, a Witch arriving always held the promise of…


Even if Arachn-mother came and freed him, it wouldn’t change what she’d already done. Things wouldn’t be the same anymore, but if it meant leaving this disgusting prison-

In any case, Kid had never sensed Arachn’s soul. She hadn’t come to this prison at all, as far as Kid knew. Hell, Kid hadn’t heard a mention of her from the Clowns’ whispers, and he was curious, curious of what the hell was going on in her head, of what she thought of Kid’s Grim Reaper nature…

Though, giving him up to the Clowns was a pretty clear indication of where mother stood.

Kid was scared.

The Witch soul came closer and Kid recognised its owner.

*Medusa.* She’d come in and out frequently, though she’d never come in this close, not in Kid’s prison. Perhaps she acted as a messenger from Arachn…?

Kid perked up as he sensed another soul close to Medusa. It was a blue one, a true blue unlike the others here that were trying to twist themselves into reds. The closer she got the more details Kid could make out, like how its blue hue was a pale one and how it let out weak pulses...

It was a dead soul.

Kid’s fingers flexed reflexively towards the soul, even if the rational part of his mind knew it was in vain. The soul was so tantalisingly close, if he could just reach out...

The Egg let out an amused hum. “Did you see that, Lady Medusa? An instantaneous reaction.”

“Quite,” came a second voice, this one belonging to the purple soul, Aunt- the Witch Medusa. “Remove the gag.”
The restraint at his mouth was removed, leather sticking to his skin. Though Kid still couldn't breathe, he could now least slightly move his sore jaw.

Why did they unbind his mouth? They had never done that before. Were they planning to finally try to torture information out of him? Perhaps pull his teeth out? His tongue out? Maybe they wanted to force him to swallow poison or some other infernal concoction? None of the above? All of the above?

Kid was so, so scared.

The soul was brought close to his mouth and Kid tried to reel his head back, even if he was acutely aware he could barely move.

What was Medusa doing? All Kid wanted was to touch the soul, with his hands preferably, so why bring it close to his mouth?

“Come now,” came Medusa’s voice, always with that hint of amusement typical of her. “Eat it—”

“No,” Kid let out before his conscious mind could even comprehend Medusa’s question, his voice low and breathless. Not that his answer would change had more time passed.

“I'll reward you if you do…” Medusa continued, bringing the soul right by his mouth.

Kid didn’t bother to answer, keeping his mouth shut. Though determined not to eat the soul, he couldn’t help but think what would come next. Would they force him to eat the soul? To eat more souls? To become like that vile red soul abominations?

Kid was so very scared.

The soul was pulled back and Kid relaxed. A few moments later the Egg moved to the back to the room whereas Medusa came closer and started fiddling with his bindings. Most of the ones covering his ears were removed and Kid tensed in anticipation. At least his hearing was now unimpaired -

“I'll let you go if you do.” Medusa’s voice was right by his ear, barely above a whisper. The soul was brought close to his mouth again as Kid clenched his teeth, lips pressed firmly over them.

“In fact,” Medusa continued, unfettered, “just eat this one little soul and not only will I let you go, I'll help you get rid of all the Clowns here…”

Wait, what? Had Kid misheard her? Was Medusa truly offering to-?

Kid suppressed a cough as his fingers clenched into a fist; he only had to be given an inch. Despite not having been given any food or water, Kid was full of energy. He knew the pathing of this facility thanks to the movement of souls, he had made a mental map of it, so if he managed to make a run for it… Everything was so scary so maybe he should just…

His lips curled, showing teeth. Though he couldn't see her, he felt Medusa's soul thrum in anticipation.

Kid was terrified.

“Just one measly soul and you will get your true freedom—”

The soul touched his lip -a memory of red, a landscape of bodies, his skin sliding off his flesh- and Kid wretched his face away, pulling at the bindings on his head until they cracked and gave way.
The one at his eyes fell away and Kid blinked, sight adjusting until he saw Medusa, having taken a step back and still clutching that poor soul.

“No!” Kid gasped as the Egg rushed him with a curse, tying a new set of restraints on his head.

“Lady Medusa, back away for your own safety,” came the Egg’s raspy voice as he pulled at the new restraints. Kid resisted him, but all he could do now was push his head against the direction the Egg was pulling, in an unorthodox tug-of-war.

As more Kishin Eggs scrambled in the room, Kid scanned the area. It was dark, with only a faint blue candlelight at its entrance. The walls were of solid rock, jagged and uneven, same as the floor. Besides the door, Kid couldn’t make out any other route of escape-

His eyes locked with Medusa as she finally stepped forward again and Kid’s expression instinctively twisted into a scowl.

“Go... burn...” he uttered, having to speak each word individually since he couldn’t get enough air in his lungs.

A grimace flickered on Medusa’s face before being instantly replaced by her typical smug expression. She stood casually as Kid kept wrestling against the gaggle of Eggs trying to replace the torn restraints.

“Lady Medusa,” came the Egg’s voice again, “I must insist-”

“There is no need to worry. You seem to have everything under control,” Medusa answered while Kid manoeuvred his head so that a potential binding slipped off it. “And he’ll say yes eventually.”

Kid momentarily froze at that remark, allowing an Egg to wrap one of the strips around his head and pull it back, painfully colliding against the beam used as a skeleton for his bindings. More and more restraints were then tried around it, until his head was completely enveloped by them, just like before and wasn’t that the scariest thing-

“I’ll need more blood,” came Medusa’s voice before Kid sensed her lean into him again. “And you can always change your mind. I’ll unearth what you’re so desperately suppressing.”

“No,” Kid repeated before his mouth was covered as well. His eyes felt wet, the area under them as well, squashed as it was by the new restraints.

As Medusa’s soul vanished from his Soul Perception and as the other Eggs departed as well, leaving him alone, Kid’s heart grew heavy. He too wanted to leave, more than anything…

But he couldn’t, not when he had to eat a soul to do so. Even… even if he didn’t recall exactly what had happened when Medusa had brought the soul too close, Kid still wouldn’t have eaten those poor things. Hopefully.

Besides, who was to say that Medusa was telling the truth in the first place? That would defeat the whole purpose of trapping Kid, wouldn’t it? But, even if Medusa wasn’t lying, Kid would make the same choice. Even if he wanted his freedom but this tiny little soul didn’t deserve this fate. None of them did, none of them deserved to linger painfully in this realm after their death, let alone be devoured.

More confusingly, Medusa had nothing to gain if the Grim Reaper ate one measly soul, didn’t she? To become an Egg, one had to eat dozens, and then keep gorging on innocent people to maintain their power. There were rumours that souls were addictive, and eating one had a domino effect, but
that was for humans. Kid was the Grim Reaper, so there must have been a difference there, right?

Nonetheless, the fact that she had tried in the first place, ha she had been allowed to do so by the Clowns and whoever else was in charge of the operation -if Medusa wasn’t the head of it herself- made one thing painfully clear:

No one was coming to save him.

Chapter End Notes

Reviews are appreciated.
Liz’s head pounded as she hit the bed.

She and Patty had been allowed to stay the night—or maybe it was day, this place was underground, and she had completely lost track of time— and Liz was somewhat grateful. Not only would her sister have a warm place to stay, it meant Liz could team up with the Deathscythes... Because that was a thing she had to do now, if she wanted to keep on sort-of living.

Goddammit, what a mess.

Liz let out a long-suffering sigh. Well at least now she could stop wondering why her body was doing weird things. It was all due to the simple fact that she was simply…

Fuck that Noah guy, honestly. A madman working for a bigger madman, or rather not even ‘man’ when it came to Noah’s boss. Who the hell did he think he was, coming in and trying to order her around?

…Except he didn’t really try and order her. He just told her what she should do, in the most asshole-ish way possible. And really, his ‘orders’ made sense. Because of her… situation, it made sense that if anyone fucked around with Death she’d suffer the consequences.

Fuck.

She’d have to have a talk with the Deathscythes tomorrow. Make up something about why she wanted to join them, making sure to avoid any and all zombie references. Maybe something about how they’d helped her and her sis out and it was a street honour thing, though no such thing existed. There was no such foolish notions of nobility and sportsmanship as anyone with even an inkling of them ended up dead, or worse.

…Speaking of, how the hell had Liz been done in? The more she thought about it, the more she realised there was a gap in her memories. One day she was out with Patty in their usual routine and the next she was in that goddamned coffin holding on to a dangling Kid.

Did Patty know? If so, she wasn’t acting stranger than usual. But, even if Patty knew, Liz didn’t want to ask her. What if Patty’s subconscious had buried the memories, or if she hadn’t witnessed the act in the first place? No, Liz asking her would only cause unnecessary distress.

Kid may have known, since he was apparently the Grim Reaper —and also thought of himself as Arachne’s child, but that was a rabbit hole Liz wasn’t in the mood for— but he had gone and got himself captured by the Clowns.
Maybe the Deathscythes knew? Liz had somehow ended up in the Academy, so it definitely played a role in her demise. Maybe they kept records somewhere, which was even more of a reason to stick with this group.

…What would Liz do if she found out what had happened to her? Like yeah, if she’d been done in by some bastard, her first goal would be to take them out, but what would she do after that? Keep pretending that she was a perfectly normal and alive human being? Confess to Patty? Have some weird hocus-pocus revelation that death is the next great beyond or some nonsense and pass away? Would it be up for her to decide, even?

Once again, fuck.

\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*

Arachne lounged in her study’s armchair, going over an old tome. Dim sunlight filtered through a small window, bathing the room in twilight. A fireplace opposite of her cackled, shielding he room against the outside winter cold.

Arachne took a sip from a nearby wine glass and flipped a page. The tome she was reading was more akin to frantic scribbles, unnecessarily formalised. Purportedly, the tome’s author had gone mad and committed suicide after its completion, which had piqued Arachne’s interest. However, besides coded instructions for spells that would seem powerful to any Witch beneath her station, the majority of the book spoke of wild conspiracies, of humans disappearing only to come back with a newfound obsession with death and the occult. The contents were disappointing and, worst of all, pedestrian.

Arachne shut the tome and placed it aside, lounging back into the comfy armchair. She let out a deep breath and rubbed her brow; this was supposed to be her free time, yet here she was, chasing ghosts.

The sound of scribbling distracted her, and Arachne looked to the side where a small figure was hunched over a study. His feet dangled over the adult-sized chair - he had to use a child step stool to reach the chair which was padded to make him able to reach the full height of the study - as he scribbled on a piece of paper with a black crayon.

Arachne watched Kid silence. She couldn’t help but notice his newfound hunch as the padded chair made him too tall for the study. How old was he now? Five, soon to be six? It felt like barely a year had passed since Arachne took him in.

“Hey there,” Arachne let out.

“Hi,” Kid absent-mindedly replied back, still focused on scribbling.

“Are you doing your homework?”

“No. I have finished that. I am drawing,” Kid said. Ever since he started talking, his words were slow and careful. She wasn’t sure where his predisposition to formality came, but she was glad for it nevertheless, though perhaps not as enthusiastic as Mosquito - her manservant had taken up carrying treats on him 24/7 as rewards for good behaviour and Arachne was wondering if she had to start worrying about Kid getting a sugar rush.

Arachne eyed the tome, but then turned Kid. “What are you drawing?”

“We,” Kid said, not looking up from his drawing.

“It sounds lovely,” Arachne said and gave Kid a small smile. After all it was important for a parent to encourage the use of both logical and creative skills. “Can I see it?”
Kid paused and turned to look back at Arachne. Moments later, he made a final scribble with the black canyon, clutched the drawing by his chest and jumped down the chair—Arachne inwardly flinching at the latter part and considering ordering Mosquito to layer the study’s floor with thick carpet, just in case. He still held his drawing by his chest as he climbed on his mother's lap, Arachne helping him along. When he settled in, he leaned over at the coffee table, deposited his drawing carefully as to not wrinkle the paper and looked up at his mother expectantly.

Arachne took in the drawing and her serene expression froze in place.

Kid had drawn her in a simplistic manner, as expected from a child; Arachne was a simple stick figure with a thick black triangle dress. The devil was in the details though; the base colour of her stick figure was purple, and her face was made up of two blue dots and a thin line with a slight downward curve.

That wasn’t the real kicker though; on the left of Arachne, where one of her stick arms were extended, was a black blob. It had no discernible shape nor any outlying colour. It looked like her child had just taken the black crayon and had tried to fill an arbitrary space.

"Mother?"

Kid’s voice snapped her back to reality. There were many questions Arachne wanted to ask, but she settled for a simple question. "Why did you draw us like that?"

The boy frowned in thought as he looked over his drawing. "Mother's soul is purple so I used purple colour."

"Why is my expression like that?" Arachne asked shortly after. Even if the strangeness of the black shape was her primary concern, she couldn’t help but wonder why the drawing of her looked… solemn. Sad even.

Kid’s frown persisted as he looked between Arachne and his drawing. "Because you look like that. When reading the book,” he added before Arachne could speak.

…Ah. So, the strange expression was just a coincidence. Hopefully. Still, this left her with…

Arachne indicated at the black shape. "Who is that supposed to be?"

“Me.” Kid’s neutral expression turned into one of confusion as he looked up at Arachne. "Is there something wrong with it?"

Arachne blinked as she looked between Kid and the shape. Did he truly not see a difference between the two drawings? "You didn’t paint yourself as a stick figure like me. You just made a… blob. Why?"

"Um…” Kid looked at the drawing and tilted his head. " I don’t know…” The child’s expression fell when he looked up at Arachne. “Do you not like it?”

“A-Ah, no,” Arachne was quick to reassure him, even if her words felt untrue. “I think it’s very… uncommon.”

Kid’s fallen expression didn’t improve. “I’m sure you can draw better, Mother…”

“Better is a subjective term, especially when it comes to art,” Arachne responded, feeling more at ease when talking about philosophy even at a very surface level aimed for a child. “And one of the joys of viewing art is examining and interpreting the artist’s style.”
Kid gave her another confused look. Perhaps Arachne took it a bit far with the philosophy lecture.

“What I mean to say is that I think your drawing is unique and I like it,” Arachne said shortly after, enveloping Kid in a hug. Kid let out a small giggle and Arachne thought her mission was accomplished, only for Kid to reach out and grab a pen from Arachne’s coffee table.

“Can you please draw too?” Kid asked politely. “I would like to see Mother’s drawing too.”

Arachne first instinct was to refuse -purely artistic pursuits were never of interest- but this was a special request. “Of course.”

Arachne had little artistic skills, more used to drawing blueprints than people. As a result, her drawings were a glorified amalgamation of shapes, all meshed together to resemble a human being. Thus, she didn’t spend much thought on drawing her own form, never really understanding the appeal of a self-portrait. For the next drawing though, she tried to make every line perfect, though the resulting product was Kid with a head too big for him, who nonetheless had a big smile on his face.

“That’s me,” Kid said, his tone somewhere between a question and an observation.

“Yes.”

“I have a big smile.”

“Of course you do,” Arachne said and gave Kid another quick hug. ”It’s because you’re going to grow up big and strong and happy.” When she pulled back, she saw Kid stare at his sketch. “What’s wrong?”

“My drawing…” Kid pointed at the paper. “The floor is crooked.”

Arachne frowned as she went over the sketch. She hadn’t noticed it before, but the floor -or rather the one line meant to represent the floor- was perfectly straight. Had Kid used a ruler to make it?

“It is tilted and it is throwing everything off. Asymmetrical and unbalanced…” Kid grumbled and Arachne felt a small pit in her stomach. Not this again. “It must be why you didn’t like it-”

“Kid,” Arachne began, her voice firm but hopefully not hostile, “what have we said about that?”

“But…”

“Kid…”

Kid went silent, though he was avoiding looking at the drawing now.

Arachne let out a sigh. Let it never be said that parenting was easy.

“Everything will be ok. It’s fine if your drawing is… asymmetrical.”

“Is it?”

“Yes. Nothing bad will come from it.” Arachne stroked Kid’s cheek before enveloping him in another hug. “Nothing bad will come to you. I won’t allow it. Mother’s promise.”

When Kid hugged her back, Arachne closed her eyes at the embrace.

Something wet dripped down her torso.
Arachne eye’s snapped wide open. She was still holding on to Kid, but he was bigger now, a growing teenager. His clothes were torn and soaked, with blood running freely from deep cuts in his neck and lower torso.

The fireplace crackled and died. Twilight gave away to darkness, yet Kid still cast a long monstrous skull-shaped shadow. When he spoke, his voice, deeper now, having lost that childish high-pitch, came from everywhere.

“Then why did you let this happen?”

Arachne woke up with a scream.

Chapter End Notes

Comments are appreciated.

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