Heh Killua
by dadou

Summary

BEAUTIFUL READERS, GO READ THIS AT FF NET UNTIL I UPDATE/FIX THIS HERE. This version is missing a lot of pieces and revisions and is only 25 chapters. down on FF we are already at 32!... I would take it down but so many people have written here and i don't want to lose your words... And I actually like A03! I just need time. Meanwhile go to that other page please for updates

What is your limit killu?What can someone like..him expect?But he'd ran away and a tanned boy had stumbled in his way. And now he'd do anything to protect him. Even when his past returns..to push him to the limit. Killu/Gon. Adult Situations, Abuse
The Mission

Chapter Notes

**Pairings:** Killua/Gon, minor Kurapika/Leorio

**Spoilers:** This takes place after Greed Island. It begins after Gon and Killua get the chance to spend one month with Kaito studying new species. The Chimera Ant Arc has not yet happened

**What to Expect:** This fan fiction requires adult readers ;). In order to depict certain themes, I have examined difficult subjects, crude realities that, although usually avoided in fiction, happen only too often in real life. I only emplaced them to fictional characters to portray them in-depth. This is why you will not only find adult language and situations, along with fluff, shounen-ai and probably yaoi to your delight, but also scenes of extreme abuse, psychological, physical, and yes, sexual, with all the complexity and damage it carries. I may get raw in my strive to bring you the truth of each character. I do understand, however, that there are all kinds of readers, so I encourage all of you to read what you like with freedom, and I promise to put a warning at the beginning of each chapter as to the nature of the content, so that more sensitive readers may skip it if they feel like it.

**Warnings:** Adult language, sexual content, yaoi, rape.

**Review Guidelines:** Constructive criticism is always welcome; flammers claiming how same-sex relations are against nature- or how sexual abuse is in any crevice of the realms of ethics a possibility- aren't welcome.

**Summary:** What is your limit Killua? What can someone like… him expect from life? He hadn't had to worry about those answers -not anymore- from the day a black-haired boy stumbled in his way. Once long gone he had nothing to lose, now he'd do anything to protect him. Even if his past returns...to push him to the limit. Killua/Gon. Minor Kurapica/Leorio in advanced chapters.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

**CHAPTER 1: x THE MISSION x**

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Music for this chapter: Mika-We are Young

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Two bright faces stared at Netero with wide eyes. The white-haired boy was taller than his raven companion. Netero chuckled. It was beautiful how life gathered opposites, and managed to still-still-surprise him with young spirits at his age.
"You may sit down." The youngsters nodded, but did not sit, expectant. Netero proceeded to feign a serious expression.

"You have been summoned here... And the reason should be celebrated." As he spoke he took careful note of their expression. Both of the kids were wide-eyed, yes, yes. But one radiated anticipation, while the other was pretending to act indifferent. One was already accepting any challenge to be proposed, whatever to come. The other was imperceptibly covering both of their backs.

"... Since the motive of our meeting is celebratory, I ordered champagne." Netero presented a tray with wine glasses filled with clear sizzling liquid. "Now, I'm aware of your age. But it is a special day. And we are celebrating because of your age after all. Would you like to try—"

The raven had already taken the glass from the table far too curious for the speech to finish. He sniffed it and dipped in a finger to taste the liquid. Netero could not help the old giggle again. The tanned boy had probably never had the luxury hear the name of such a beverage.

The other boy had looked at the tray with catlike eyes and a smug grin, as if champagne was known and welcome... and considering his past job, the boy had probably enjoyed the taste in company of quite élite festive gatherings —other, darker types of celebrations... He watched the pale boy sipping the drink quietly probably by default having checked with sight, smell and taste that it wasn't poisoned. They were so different. In such thoughts the old man hadn't realized that now both were looking at him curious, huge eyes, violet and caramel. They elicited in the old man a low grumble, sure the young ones on the other side of the desk would recognize the poorly concealed laughter.

Almost simultaneously, Killua and Gon said, "What is it?" They looked at each other, then back at the hunter committee president, wondering why the crazy man was laughing, and how come he took so long for such a bad introduction. Gon was actually also wondering why they always spoke at the same time.

Killua spoke first. "Old man, if you don't begin soon, I'll serve myself the entire bottle before you notice." He pointed smoothly to the rest of champagne on Netero's desk. "We are kids, and that shouldn't happen under your care."

Renowned hunters, Killua thought. Particularly OLD renowned hunters. Geez, it's like each one's crazier than the other... I wonder how it will be when we find Gon's father... His thoughts were interrupted by a tremulous voice that sounded disturbingly close.

"How dare you act like that in front of Netero-sama?"

The short phlegmatic assistant had presented both boys to the president earlier that evening, having lectured them on etiquette for an hour before the reunion. He continued his annoyed claim "You... you don't speak without his permission! You should say 'What is it, Mr. Netero, or 'What is the cause of your laughter, Your Excellence Mr. Netero'? And you should thank him for the champagne before drinking it, and of course wait for his cue. Weren't you paying attention?"

Netero continued to laugh as he waved his hand to silence his agitated assistant.

"Leave them, they are too amusing!"

"So... what is it oldish man?" Killua grinned against his glass, and Gon nudged him (-Killua, behave!) (-Hey, it hurt!)

The assistant was about to pass out, so Netero interceded. "Please, my dear assistant, don't worry
about these kids. You are free to go now." The man bowed three times and left, still fumbling about the incident.

"You must be wondering why you are here, and what are we celebrating."

_Hasn't he said that, like, three times now?_ To Killua, this was trying his patience dangerously so. Gon, instead, nodded politely, attempting to behave, but quite unable to hide his excitement.

"We are celebrating because you are being assigned your first Hunter Association mission. Considering your age, this is an enormous achievement and therefore I congratulate you on the nomination. It is now up to you to accept the challenge. "The old man observed attentively.

A light sparked in Killua's eyes for the first time in the conversation. It was not because of Netero's praise; he'd heard about his youthful competence many times before. It wasn't even the professional compliment of being assigned a mission. He didn't care where he was going. He would get adventure, something he'd grown to fancy. He got to stay with Gon as well. He was undeniable sure Gon would love whatever Netero planned for them to do.

The chairman could already see Gon imagining all sort of epic fights and monsters and adventurous scenarios. So Netero added, patting the raven boy's head, "Don't get ahead of yourselves. This is a reasonably simple mission. Actually, one of the most simple I've given as a chairman." He could see both faces dropping in disappointment. The old man chuckled.

"However, it is my duty to inform you that you are indeed the youngest hunters to get assigned a Hunter Association mission in 120 years. And I have never met anyone that has achieved such potential and talent in such a short span of life- 12 years. That's not at all a simple accomplishment. So, let's cheer!"

Netero raised his glass, and affected surprise when he saw that both kids had drunk the champagne from their glasses long ago. They had nothing to cheer up with and looked doubtful about what to do next. The old man, asked, amused, "Did you like the champagne?"

"No," both boys replied in sync.

Netero had already considered this as he laughed serving them from a pitcher of cranberry juice he had under his desk. He raised his glass. "Cheers!"

"Cheers!" Gon yelled.

"Cheers," Killua said, successfully hiding that he was almost as excited as his younger friend.

And they drank.

Netero put his glass down. "So… back to business. Your mission falls in the animal hunting category. I have received excellent recommendations regarding your abilities in this field. This assignment will be extensive; accordingly, you are provided two full years to complete it. You will be given a map with different locations to be studied, and you will be given all the facilities and financial aid to travel to these places."

_That sounded nice._ Gon looked up humbled.

"Your work will be to sample all the rare species that you find there. We are only interested in new species, so you will be given a camera to check this, like the ones that I believe a fine young hunter named Kaito presented to you not so long ago."
Killua watched him open a drawer on the side of his desk. Gon grabbed one of the shiny black cameras inside, leaving Killua to take the other, satisfaction etched on their expressions at their new toys.

"So, boys, did you know that humans worldwide have registered more than one point six million species?" He took delight in the sparkle in both the boys' eyes as they examined the black devices.

"Even though that is quite a number of species, specialists believe there are many, many more yet to be discovered. They estimate that the number of hidden species exceeds—"

"10 million!" Gon blurted loudly. "They say over 10 million haven't been registered at all," he finished almost out of breath. Killua stared at Gon in disbelief.

"You are correct," Netero pointed, and the taller boy rolled his eyes.

"You're interested?"

"Yes!" Gon claimed before Netero was finished. "Yes Mr. Netero!" He tried to mend, his pitch still annoyingly high Killua noted with a sigh.

"And you? Are you interested?" The amethyst eyes looked up.

"Is there payment?" He asked cheekily- and bit his tongue with certain delay… It had sounded so… Zoldick.

"We will finance all the expenses of your trips, including food and, travelling media. Accomplishing a hunter committee assigned mission is also in itself a reward, since it will get you ranked higher as hunters" The old geezer winked.

"So, are you interested?"

Killua looked at Gon, did a quick check on a silent interchange of glances and faced Netero

"I'll do as he does," he shrugged coolly.

Netero could tell that the older boy was actually quite excited, only pretending safe nonchalance. The old man chuckled and ruffled his hair. This one tensed. And looked up and froze him cold with a harsh we're-not-children- face.

Netero cleared his throat. "So..." He unfolded a world map.

"The locations. You should first look for species in west Yoruba around the red dots." He held up the map.

The younger boy whispered, "Killua, look, we're being financed for having fun!"

The older shushed him with a nudge, a grin lingering on his lips

"Then you'll go to an isolated chain of islands in the Big Flat Ocean on a special seven-decker cruise." Netero did think it a bit extravagant for two children, but what was the point of being a venerable hunter without being able to throw around a little money now and again?

"And finally, I have a surprise for the two of you! Whale Island and Kukuruu Mountain are classified as the two of the least-studied ecosystems in the world. You'll get to study wildlife from your homelands"
Netero appreciated for a moment how Gon's face glowed at the thought of going to Whale Island. Then he noticed the stunned expression on Killua's face that lasted just a second before he adopted an impassive stance. The friendliness that had softened his boyish features erased. The albino now gazed coldly as he sipped his cranberry juice in calculation. He'd probably taken it as a punishment. But Gon had interjected before any of these observations lasted a second in Netero's mind.

"Netero-san, if we have a problem with visiting some of the locations, what should we do?" Gon set down his glass and looked directly at the chairman. Killua looked at his friend somewhat surprised. Netero considered them

"All these locations are subject to modification, of course. Should there be any problems, we can redirect you. But..."

He stood, with the sudden need for some fresh air in the room. He opened the window behind, not looking at them to proceed.

"...one of the lifelong goals of a true hunter is to learn to face it all. Even the hardest and the deadliest. The real fears reside inside us, not on locations. It would be a pity if you had a problem" Netero observed the cloudless sky gravely "It would be a pity if you had a problem." His words carefully chosen...he knew very well he had to push them a little.

He looked back at them, adopting easily the cheerful semi-senility he always displayed to his fellow Hunters. "But you are kids, after all; if you are that afraid of the storms around the Big Flat Ocean, you need only to inform me and I'll send you somewhere else." His old hands were clasped "I just suggest you to go analyzing each location when the time arrives" he tilted his head.

Netero could almost perceive the cold radiating from the older boy's chest. It was...sad. But he hoped his advice was taken wisely.

"As you have been assigned an extensive mission, you do not have to work all days of the month, or even all months. You only need to have the assignment complete within two years."

The boys nodded. "We will."

"Please know that whatever trouble you run into, you can count on me."

Netero observed them. A flashback presented to his eyes, of the times he was just a kid as well...and the many adventures and troubles and fun he'd' ran into... In what kind of adventures would these two rare children get into?

"I wish you luck in your travels." He winked at them, his tone of voice warm. He gestured the door to let them know their meeting was over...

The two boys managed to evade the assistant on their way out, and went quietly for a while in a pensive silence. Gon eyes Killua. But this one stared ahead.

Suddenly he broke the silence. "Let's do this."

"Hai!"

Chapter End Notes
This chapter was beta-ed by wonderful and amazingly bright Bushwah. You make everything shine. I extend my gratitude as a humble gift to the lap of your talent. Thanks to my beta and my inner obsessions, I hope you continue to enjoy this ride, readers.
Leorio could tell both boys had been eager to set sail.

It was not quite because of the change of scenery - though a Caribbean sea sounded like a beautiful setting for a story. No, you see, this was to peaceful for their character. They were eager rather because the summer had brought them the chance for the four of them to meet again...

Well he wouldn't deny the accompanying pleasure of the luxurious nature of the trip: The ship had not only hotel-like rooms and beautiful decks, but a showy cafeteria, a library, a pool, a game zone, a gymnasium and all the fancy things you daydreamed and imagined only singers and politicians were able to afford.

If there was some observation to be done, he could guess it was a tad awkward for them to see each other at that proximity to the equator. What with suddenly wearing light clothes, sun glasses or bathing swimwear, each with a fancy drink at their hands. Probably of an exotic fruit.

He sipped loudly in observation.

Well, anyway they were definitely ready for a month of idle living, a lifestyle none of them had actually enjoyed before in their hunter-like nomad living.

Hunter style of life for the group had meant this last years pretty much sleeping on floors, in woods or hostels. Much of their clothing had reeked of camp-fire smoke (and now it was perfectly stacked and steamed in the ship's laundry room). And like this they'd met so many people! Some with guitars, beautiful strange music and weed, others with tattoos and guns, others with an eyepatch and a story, or blinded but with pictures from strange lands printed in their gaze... They'd met soldiers of awry wars with PTSD and if not, definitely with gorgeous scars.

Leorio sighed. The routine had consisted of t knowing whether they would have lunch next day.

Now it was ALL on Gon and Killua. And maybe it was his inner dark side that enjoyed a little this - the side that had a vicious grip of money - but boy, he would make sure he’ enjoy this ride. He'd even mentally prepared himself on ordering champagne every night of the week without guilt.

Right now though the boys had disappeared... And please, do not get me wrong, the scenery stood dainty and oh- so- quaint with the blue blue sea almost blinding.

... But he was kind of bored. The doctor had only a half-way done Sudoku at his hands...And by his side sat the most boring person in the world.
Ok... so you could scrape that last as a jealous lie- ...but Leorio had tried twice to establish a proper conversation! They did have a lot to catch up on. A lot. But, stretched in their folding chairs, Kurapica's head had been buried in his book for the last hour. As if the long time they hadn't seen each other wasn't enough for at least pretending small talk.

Leorio rolled his eyes and decided to stretch his legs. Let's go find the boys.

Only then Kurapica's eyes rose a little to meet Leorio's as he stood. An apologetic expression.

Yes, you aren't good with social relations, I know, with effort he conveyed a faint friendly smile. It was mirrored with gratefulness. Before connection was lost and Kurapica's face was again eaten by the open book.

He innocently thought then that maybe, their friendship could get smoothed out with a little time and patience...

x.x.x

"Heh Killua!" a boy with sparkling eyes smiled at him.

"...Killuaaaaaaa"

But no answer came.

Gon exhaled with patience and talked aloud "So you're probably day-dreaming of chocolate or something" He looked at Killua and waved a hand in front of the other boy.

"Uh? Oh... sorry" Killua snapped out of his reverie. He smiled back "Yup?"

"There you are! I wish to inform you, something has been pulling on your fishing rod for a while now" The boy pointed solemnly.

"Uh? Oh a catch!" Killua finally acknowledged the insistent tug. "Hey wait, its a catch!" It'd been half an hour and his fist clenched in victory. And then he sat up right, and pulled with every ounce of energy he had.

And fell heavily on his back.

"OUCH! What-"

The tiniest fish ever had emerged of the sea.

The little creature was staring at him, hanging from the fishing rod, wriggling and looking really… small.

Gon burst into laughter.

"It's not funny" Killua glared, his back still against the floorboards. He truly didn't know how to approach the situation hovering in front of his eyes.

Gon shook with another fit of laughter and was thrown a murderous stare "Sorry Killua!" He chuckled. "But I win! I caught up more fish than you! Now you have to do ALL I say."

Killua was failing miserably at being menacing. But he liked Gon's laughter as he liked chocolate. He stared at the small fish and pretended to be angry for the sake of his own reputation, murmuring something about the rod's fault.
Ok so Gon had to help him pull it out. He still had a ... thing with fish. They had such dead eyes, even when alive! They stared into your soul. Dude.

"We should probably return it" Gon spoke "It's so tiny it isn't even good for an appetizer..."

He was smacked on the head by a now free Killua.

"You are being exaggerate"

"Oh come on! you want us to eat that tiny thing? It might be someone's son or little brother! Imagine that poor family looking for their so tiny baby fish!" He said, probably already endeared with the fish on his hands.

"Here I present to you Gon, along with his family complex and dork giggle" He bowed and then took the fish of Gon's hand and threw it to the sea.

"Hey, Killua it's not a rugby ball you know?"

"Oh, I'm sure he enjoyed the flight." Killua held the rod again determined.

"Now Gon, prepare! I'm catching a REAL fish this time" Oh, yes, he would not lose to Gon. Never! He would show an actual Freecs he could learn how to FISH! and-and with such magnificence that the boy would end up crying alone in a corner over his success!

His thoughts were interrupted by Gon's gentle voice.

"Do you think that fish arrived safely to where it was?"

... He was such a lesser person than Gon.

"Gon...the fish is not your little brother..." Killua stated, and Gon's cheeks tinged pink. "You are right! It's just, you know...when growing up I missed having a little brother. I had an entire phase of wanting Mito to marry and give me one"

Explosion of laughter.

"Give you one!"

But then his rod fell to the sea. He saw the shadow of his makeshift-metal-rod sinking in the water. His visage changed swift to the infamous Zoldick-killer stare. "That was your fault!"

"Not" And Gon was the one now laughing.

"It was! GEEZ" Killua snapped vexed. "And anyway Gon, if you hadn't noticed, along with your a family complex you have a HUGE ANIMAL complex. I mean, what with rescuing all the stray ones."

"But now I have one!"

"An animal? "

"A little brother!" Gon chirped. And Killua actually couldn't tell if Gon was trying to bother him or if he was speaking his heart out as usual. Either way the suntan made his evil thoughts all the more
appealing: There was a silver blur and suddenly Gon was tackled to the water viciously.

"Waaaaaaaah!" the tanned boy cried almost choking "Hey! What was that for?" He spluttered above water, trying to swim past Killua's arms.

"Oh, excuse-moi frere Gon" Killua said with pretense French accent "I just thought you had suggested I was your little brother, or something demeaning of the sort. I had to remind you that I am the older one here." He grinned smug "So nothing of little-brothering me ok? Besides you're not my brother! That'd be weird!"

"But I'm the strongest! And I'm the one teaching you how to fish! And don't you dare use French cause it reminds me of that freaking CLOWN!"

"Exactly. I do know how to piss you off no? AND YOU'RE NOT THE STRONGEST"

neck choking hold. But Gon freed himself and in the process slapped Killua on his face with his foot.

"How heavens did you do tha-" But someone grabbed him by the ankles and pulled him down. Killua struggled to finally emerge from the water and hit Gon. Still coughing, Gon exclaimed "You're too fast!" Genuine admiration and curiosity. Killua, proud, was about to answer when his head was underwater being pressed down by a tanned arm. Killua twisted it sending the owner flying away.

Gon's face emerged from the water, catching his breath and laughing.

He smiled at Killua laughing.

Killua smiled back. Happy.

But then he realized Gon stiffened. He was seeing something past him. His honeyed eyes darkened.

"Hello little brother" An icy dead voice.

...Time stopped. The back of Killua's hair stood. He turned slowly, indifferent.

"What do you want Illumi"

Illumi observed him. As if devouring him with that one stare...

"Won't you reply to me politely brother? I guess some of the old days are gone"

Disgust leaped in his chest.

"What do you want ?"

Killua was surprised by his own casual indifference when in truth he felt...something he wouldn't be inclined to describe.

He climbed easily to the deck again. Conscious of keeping a safe distance. But a movement beside distracted him: Gon stood near him, drenched wet a he was. And his eyes... it was Gon's version of a murder stare, directed at Illumi with defiance.

Illumi had tilted his head at this. He spoke softly...as if savouring each word. "We meet again Gon Freecs...Always by Killua's side. Such a fine...pet"
"Go away" Gon let out bluntly. It could have been rude weren't they in front of Brother...Illumi's gaze was oppressive as he spoke toneless words.

"Tell me, is it the other way round?...There is no denying though, Gon, that you are a fiery tiger...a small tiger though...Such a beautiful tiger cub. A wondrous strong spirit. In such a fragile small body."

Killua almost heard audibly something snapping inside him. He moved-a need to get Gon out of Illumi's stare with urgency. Gon was faster, just a hand to his shoulder as he spoke confident.

"Illumi, first looks are deceiving. Your long hair, for example, from behind looks like a woman. It's when you talk that a passer by would tell you're a man. In the same way I may look fragile, but I'm not."

Killua felt the weirdest feeling. Like laughing in just the best of oddest situations. Gon probably even hadn't meant it as an insult but as a correction. A situation that posed the more hilarity. Weren't it the fact he couldn't breathe.

It was for just for one second but a trained-since-youth Killua saw it. Venom. Pure, powerful hatred stirring in the depth of those black eyes. An intent behind them that Killua knew only too well, a look that had always preceded lots of damage. Just a fleeting second, before Illumi shifted his attention to Killua neutrally. As if it hadn't existed at all.

"I've been looking for you Killua..." He locked his dark gaze on him. The daunting monotone voice in the black canvas of his gleamless stare "I've been in the hunt for you...following your deeds for some time. You should feel elated by this special attention you are being given...I travelled so far...to come here. But do not worry, I'm staying"

"W-w-hat do you mean, where are you staying"

"The ship."

There was a vicious absence of expression on his face. Oh, that sinking feeling, his mouth gaping to protest but he was interrupted. Or more of stolen the air from his lungs directly. Each of the monotone words...

"Isn't it nice Killua? Arranging some contacts, moving strings just as easily with only the power of a family name...My crew actually has been given the suite rooms. But I guess you do know the ways of your last name" He opened his arms slightly "To be here..."

It made his blood boil, his demeaning cast. The mention of the Family- and the crew he spoke off- weren't those pin struck mannequins? His hands had tensed, almost clenching to fists. But Gon reacted first.

"We won our right to be on this ship on sole merit Illumi. Netero has our back"

Gon radiated anger. And that was risky. No Gon, don't fall on it, he wants you to feed him information-

"What do you want Illumi" He spoke quick.

...You
His heart stopped entirely before he heard a normal monotonous reply.

"Right now Killua, I need help with a little work. Nothing that could be considered time-consuming. Will you come?"

"I'm not a killer any more Illumi" He glared.

Illumi assented.

"You may say that aloud if you want to" Killua detained Gon swift. The raven had been about to punch the elder. Illumi...he was almost smirking.

"However Killua, what you're being asked to do is not that kind of work." His heart skipped one beat.

"Then what is it?" He heard Gon's voice. Defiant and far-off. The throbbing of his pulse was too loud on his forehead-

"We need information on an old target, and Killua may be useful for this." He paused "In exchange he will be paid, Little Gon"

That phrasing made him dizzy and even more hateful if that was possible

But Illumi had knowingly turned to Killua

"Follow me brother" Not a request. An order... He could almost physically feel the oppressive controlling aura. The bastard.

"No. Killua is staying here" Gon stepped in front of the silver-haired boy.

But then... it happened. Too imperceptible but far too clear. For an instant Illumi's menace, the foul intent of his aura was directed at Gon as if an arrow. The move was too fast, even Gon hadn't noticed. Because the threat was meant for him...

It was the best strategic warning

Illumi tilted his head and Killua realized in delay he'd taken a step forward. And another. Away from Gon. Towards Brother...

"Killua! You don't have to do what he says " Gon spoke alarmed "Let's go please?"

Killua exhaled. And he felt...warmth as he looked back at Gon with care.

"Don't worry Gon. I'll go check out what this freak wants. I'll be back in no time"

Killua realized his own demeanor hadn't even once slackened. His voice was still nonchalant, his face a mask of ease. Only his palms sweating.

Seeing Gon upset he whispered confidently "Hey, don't worry blockhead. To worry is only giving this a place that's not worth it." He almost spoke as if to himself. "I'm checking this out of curiosity. Maybe it'll be a lead on the Kuruta clan's eyes, or something of our interest... It may even have to do with Gin" He was speaking nonsense out pure adrenaline, while his eyes where that still that
miraculous picture of perfect calmness.

He paused

"… When I return I want to see a fish for lunch" He smiled, trying to ignore the coldness creeping up his chest.

He gave a decisive step forward now, avoiding the dead black stare he knew so well.

"Killua, don't go" Gon was suddenly pleading.

"I'm sorry Gon"

"But I don't want you to!"

"I'm still going"

"Killua! Agh! Listen to me!" Yes, there it was, the risk of Gon losing his head... at plain sight

"Goodbye Gon"

"No I wont let-"

"Baa-ka" Killua murmured under his breath. And pushed his friend cleanly to the water. He turned his back to a probably very annoyed Gon. He stumbled with the daunting dark stare that he could guess was disgust at the friendly display…

Illumi turned and commanded

"Follow"

A step. Another step...and at the ship's window glass in front of him Killua saw Gon's cast down reflection. He was standing, soaking wet, seeing him leave with his honey eyes fixed on his back.

...

He followed Illumi from a distance. Stepping on his shadow from time to time with growing stress. They turned onto a deserted corner that led downstairs. Low into the belly of the ship. Killua hesitated... and continued to trail behind down the flight of stairs, his head cast down.

He tried to rationalize what was happening, but his thoughts too loud for his own sanity, racing, racing. Probably a job and they really needed the info on an old target...or a family meeting. Maybe only father sending a message through Brother and nothing more.

Maybe they wanted him to return.

No. Probably a meeting- Or a job-Or a meeting- Or maybe none-Tap- tap- tap down the stairs-

But Illumi turned to face him quite suddenly. So fast Killua almost stumbled into him.

And before any possible reaction Killua was lifted by his neck and forced against the wall. He felt the air of his lungs leave him. The dark bottomless eyes beheld him. Killua's senses were screaming danger-his vision had already flickered to search for passer-by finding none.

"You probably have missed me Kills" The real Illumi.
Too much time was passing. He'd even eaten one of the sandwiches he and Killua had prepared for lunch. Well he was always eating Killua's meal in advance if his friend wasn't already on it. But it was way past lunch hour and Killua hadn't come back…

A part of him was utterly other one was kind of worried, because he disliked with all the expanse of his soul Killua's family. Particularly, you would not want to get Gon started on Killua's elder brother. The feral dislike that sprang from within him at his image was no surprise- his presence brought to the forefront of his mind the hunter's exam and his rage at waking up with his friend gone. He hadn't even been given the chance to be for Killua there, at their match, to yell the truths and lies properly. Even now, sensing how Killua's boy changed under Illumi's stare He-god- He hated it. It made his blood boil to frightening levels. It made him want to kill.

Gon tossed his fishing rod again to the sea exhaling with frustration. He kept his favorite colorful baits at his side...Had someone seen him there, sprawled on the ship's deck on his bright green outfit, they would be endeared. Unless they stumbled with the depth of his gaze. No boy dwelt there right now.

The exact word wasn't bored but worried. Sick worried. If someone hurt him, he would kill.

Gon stretched and let himself fall on his back.

Killua where are you? He wanted to go and explore the islands beyond the sea. With Killua. No one else.

Gon looked at the brilliant blue sky, crossed by elongated clouds. He looked at the strips of white, suspended high above. With half lidded eyes he thought of Killua, feeling the warm summer breeze. He extended his arms to trace invisible words lazily with his fingers...

Killua... and all he was …...

Chocolate...
Mint...
Claws...
Silk...
Fangs...
Sparks…
Silver...

And amethyst eyes. Magnetic amethyst eyes.

Gon held his hands lazily seeing the invisible words he'd written. Memories of adventures flashed in front Gon's eyes. Thousands! They fell around Gon like photographs he'd thrown to the skies.

There'd been a time when Gon had (against all odds) poisoned Killua with his brilliant cooking. Killua, hating the hospital IVS and pulling them off whenever he was awake, had sent a sample to his family lab, with high reluctance yet worry that he was not resistant to well, all as he had thought … Gon laughed. (Don't you laugh Freecs, the boy had said at the moment…).

Or...that time they'd been trapped on the elevator. And Killua out of boredom had asked Gon- for the tenth time- if he wished he had listened to his mother's voice on the tape Ging had left him.

Gon had turned around and inquired Killua if he regretted hurting so viciously his mother and Milluki the day he ran away.

That time they were camping on a meadow…and had woken surrounded by a hundred sheep.

That time someone had sent Killua a present. Gon had to admit it, he'd been slightly jealous. He wasn't expecting the present to blow off:

Blackmail.

And that time they'd been hours on end playing with helium balloons, their voices and a camera. Kurapica had been unfortunate to walk in to the strange scene. He tried to approach the situation with an expression similar to that of Killua in front of fish.

Gon let out a soft sigh as he felt the sun warming his skin.

Where are you?

He didn't want to call the boy's cell phone. Maybe it was a stupid family issue of no importance. And he, a spiky hair boy with a frantic idiotic mind, would complicate the meeting by calling Killua…He wanted to respect Killua's independence. Particularly because he was adamant on admitting his own recent dependence on his companionship.

Maybe he could just call Killua to yell something along the lines like "It's way past lunch, I feel like an idiot waiting"

But then the imaginary Killua in Gon's head kind of answered "I already ate. Why haven't you eaten?" With a isn't-it-obvious-I-already-ate voice

"I was waiting for you!"

"Why?" imaginary Killua sounding aloof. Undertone of can't-you do anything on your own.

A silence on Gon's side, and his final resignation "Ok, ok. I was making sure you were fine"

"Gon, you should let me be sometimes. I have a life of my own you know, with my own agenda" imaginary Killua said annoyed and bored.

"Now do a favor to yourself and go eat"

Gon was aware his imaginary Killua was closer to his fears than reality. Actually it did not correlate
at all to reality, but that's the way with fears and the people you loved.

He hadn't said that. He meant people he cared for.
Anyway, Killua wouldn't say anything like that at all. It was what Gon probably treasured dearly about Killua. He did not get tired of an extremely tiresome Gon.

Actually, it sometimes surprised Gon how complete was Killua's acceptance. Because Gon was well aware of how he was... Curious. Idiot. Sometimes painfully naïve. Friendly, sure. But impulsive. Good-willed. And horribly stubborn. Strong headed and hyperactive in a way Aunt Mito hadn't been able to deal with properly.

Others tried to take advantage of his naïvety and good will, or demeaned him for the child he was. But Killua went wherever Gon went even if the road was a bad decision..

Killua was the only one that actually could keep up with him...

_If I'm irrational, you de-anger me, de-madden me to return me to centre._ He'd once spoken those words aloud, to the stunned surprise of the violet eyes.

They were so many people they'd fought for or against and still, when someone was illiterate in regards to Gon's frame of mind, and doubting his sanity when he denied to step back, it was Killua, unasked, the one to reason, to explain, as he stood silently behind him.

Who was the more stupid? Because Killua, he trusted blindly Gon, and Gon, half the time he fought ahead blind.

One last thing made Killua really special.

Gon hated when someone else dared called him stupid or idiot. Gon hated especially when others believed him to be weak. An unwanted memory sometimes struck him like lightning- Hisoka's punch, the paralyzing venom, being unable to move and fight back-his-his _inability_ to fight back- ugh! It made him clench his fists. He was not something to be tossed aside. He would prove the world one day he was not _something_ to be _tossed aside_ at all.

He was not weak.

Gon suddenly realized he'd incorporated and was pacing furiously. He stopped, remembering what he was doing.

He was waiting...for his friend to arrive. He flopped to the ground again.

And...Well...Killua would never dare to take advantage of his good will. He did not want Gon more if he was stronger and less if he was weaker- (or for that matter connected this like to... _desire_ like that creepy clown). And yes, his heart stopped at the idea but oh well, what if some day he did become broken goods? a broken toy like the Kuroro they'd all seen from up the plane...Well... it...

That was the great thing

Gon usually placed value on himself in direct relation to his power... to his ability to fight...
Now... he knew that was risky...
possibly deadly...
and a roller coaster to his self-esteem.

But Killua... on whatever place Gon stood or was Killua... _He would never dare look down on Gon_. For the boy it was natural to see Gon as his equal. He actually _saw_ him.
There was a reason Killua, being tremendously strong and skilled... had taken interest on Gon as a friend... and had waited for him in the Ring Tower without a glance of thought. For Gon it was a little unbelievable, why would someone do that.

He guessed he felt the exact disbelief he saw painted on Killua's expression he saw Gon at the gates of his family state.

Gon smiled, leaning his head... loosing himself on the sea-line far beyond, where the royal blue blurred with the sky. Since long he did not question the state of affairs.

And he would never. Questioning it could open a door to terror of what would happen where it not the case...

So, that was why Killua was the only one allowed to call Gon an idiot.

He was lucky to have such a friend.

"geez! KILLUA I'M BORED"

Gon spoke aloud to himself.

He knew Killua was terrible at asking for help. He sighed. So he did not care if his friend got mad if Gon called him yet again. It was selfish to be thinking on self-image (he sometimes could get very selfish when the only thing that mattered really was if Killua was al right…

He'd vowed to protect him at all costs even if the white-haired boy hated him for that.

He found himself with his cell phone on his ear.

Beep

Beep.

Beep

No answer. He felt disheartened...

He dialled again the so known number. Again. And again.

Beep

Beep

Beep

And then silence.

Someone had actually picked up.

"Gon"

It was almost a whisper

"Killua?"

Silence.
"Killua? Is it you?"

There was no reply and Gon heart was now drumming.

"Are you ok? Where are you? Killua?"

The silence at the other end of the line sprung Gon from the ground. And he was running, running. And was about to ask where should he be heading.

"Killua speak! Where are you? And what happened? Where do I go?"

"...Too… much… questions..." Killua voice was a hoarse whisper.

There was a silence- too long a silence- long enough for a string to snap in Gon's chest. He thought Killua would not answer him at all again. But then the albino cleared his voice, and spoke faint

"...Hey...cool out... I'm fine. Sorry... there's bad connection. But I'm right here Gon. Don't worry"

"Where-are you" Gon demanded.

But then... Killua was talking in his usual casual self, about being in the room both shared. H'd come in for a nap. You don't nap. He did, he was painfully tired. No, he was ok. What about his brother? Actually nothing interesting. Yes Gon could come to their room to accompany him- he'd like that... but he'd be boring. He would sleep. No, he was fine. No he hadn't had lunch. He had chocolates. Too much. In what moment? Somewhere along the hours. He needed sleep.

_Gon_

That voice. The voice Gon knew so well- a voice whose reverse seam was a plead for him not to ask any more questions.

Gon was now walking not running. Calmer. Disconcerted.

He could read Killua's voice clearly from whatever phone across the world. And he would give him what he needed. Be it chocolates, a nap, no questions or whatever. He just needed to check if all was really Ok. If he was really fine...

Gon flung the door open moments later. He saw Killua sprawled over the bed. Gon heart was hammering inside his chest a little. Ok he _is_ here.

He slowly approached the sleeping figure and sat beside him.

"Hiya" Killua said sleepy

"Hey there" Gon whispered. He hesitated...

"You... Ok?"

"Yeah. Why wouldn't I be?" Killua chuckled. _Because you were gone for too long and you sounded weird..._

But...his eyes, they seemed to answer the real question behinds Gon's words. Killua seemed Ok. He seemed in one piece, he had been really sleeping not acting tiredness... And yet Gon could tell. He was feigning. Something.

"You sure?"

"Aha" Killua yawned.
"What did the blockhead want?"

"Nothing. Stupid stuff I couldn't help with..." He whispered bored.

"Why did you take so long then?" He persisted

"I did?" Killua frowned... "Wow... I don't even feel hunger"

"Cause you ate chocolates right?"

"... Oh... Yeah"

"...

Gon was eyeing him

"He didn't say anything bad? You are really Ok?"

"Mm-mm" Killua nodded. Actually nothing bad had happened... and yet...

"Why are you tired then? It's not like you..."

"I..." And Killua stopped staring at nothingness."Well... I really don't know."

"...Ok..." Gon murmured...
He felt silence blanketing the room.

"Why did you take so long? Where is he gone"

"I don't know...And I seriously don't care" There was an edge to his reply that cut him short. Killua was sprawled on the bed, lying on one side. And somehow he looked so... defeated... But it was just probably his paranoid imagination...

"I'm sorry Killu... I was worried, you know, Illumi gives me the chills. I hate him"

The boy smiled faintly...

"Me too"

He would not admit it. But he loved when he heard stuff like that from Gon. Say more bad things about Him Gon. It's amusing... Ah... he needed distraction right now... or sleep...

"Seriously. Freaky duude" Gon commented.

"Totally" Killua whispered smiling. "And we're blood related can you believe? Ugh" Killua chuckled lightly.

Gon searched his friend's eyes.

They stared at each other for some moments.

*He was hiding something...*

And worst was that... Killua knew Gon could tell.

"Ok.... You sleep now" Gon broke the contact, resigned.
He sat by his side, in a stance that reminded him of a guardian dog. And Killua suddenly felt he could relax against the gesture…

Gon understood...nHe closed his eyes slowly letting himself drown in the wanted blackness with hidden despair evaporating..."Sorry for being so... boring...I promise you we'll go catch more-" he yawned "More adventures..." he spoke barely.

"Sleep"

"I'm glad you're here…"

Gon smiled at this

"Thank you" Killua mumbled. He closed his eyes and turned to give him his back moments later he was breathing soundly. Gon could tell Killua had been putting effort in just keeping himself awake. The boy had indeed been tired which was all the more strange…

Gon fell to his back, beside Killua, arms over his head and did felt protective. He was mad that just a fleeting meeting had taken all of his power over the situation. The way Illumi had controlled him on the hunter's exam... all the horrible things he'd said... picturing Illumi wiring Killua to the electricity tests- agh- it made his blood boil yet again.

He observed the pale boy.

They'd had to discuss it… even though they'd hadn't touched the issue... but he had to ask Killua if it was OK if they did not go to Kukulu mountain at the end of the journey. He disliked the idea... and he knew the albino disliked it as well.

He sighed...looking at the closed silver lashes, his slowly rising and falling chest. He crept a little closer.

And waited.

Chapter End Notes

Hi! I'm sorry if this one only focuses on Gon's thoughts and views, without much action. You'll get more later, I promise ;).

What do you think? Read and Review :)
Killua awoke with a start and looked wildly everywhere. He'd dreamt with shadows dark enough to make it hard to recognize the room for a second. He looked at the boy so near him. And exhaled deeply...It was probably late in the afternoon given the light.

"You're up..." Gon yawned "you slept well?"

"Brilliant... You?" Killua replied, leaning once more against the arm he'd woken to.

"Mmmm" Gon hummed sleepily.

"Is it ok where I'm leaning? How's your arm? "The boy asked suddenly awkward.

"If I tell you "numb" you'll move?"

"Sure"

"Then not numb. Now Shhh"

Killua closed his eyes. He could feel on his left foot the nice warmth of a ray of light through the windows... And so they stayed sleepily like that for some moments.

But suddenly, Killua lifted his head, as if alarmed.

"Gon, wait" He looked at Gon with an odd suspicious expression, and sniffed the air.

"chocolate-You smell like chocolate! You-smell-like-chocolate" Killua pronounced serious

"God! You are impossible!" Gon protested

"Am I wrong?"

"...No-but..."

"So you DID eat chocolate! How could you! Without ME!" Killua took a hand to his chest with a hurt look "You are a bad person! you-ate-OH HEAVENS was it while I was sleeping? No, don't say it, I rather not know- TELL ME! Was it while I slept? You lying fiend!" Killua accused Gon with a hard poking finger to his forehead.

"STOP IT! Didn't you have too much chocolate for lunch and that's why you had a nap?"

"I always want chocolate"

In truth, with no lunch at all and of course no chocolate, finally now at six thirty p.m his appetite had finally returned, and so what?! He deserved some sweets, didn't he?

Gon smiled patiently

"Well, for your ease of mind, I haven't eaten a single chocolate. Dumbass. "
"Oh-but...you hesitated-" *I'm such a geek when it comes to chocolate-* He thought ashamed.

"No-No. You see, I do have some hidden in my pockets" Gon beamed "While you slept I went to stash myself with chocolates from the reception, to feed you when you woke up. It was supposed to be a surprise of the sort, but you're a chocolate-terminator with super chocolate radar" Gon pointed amazed.

"You *feed* me? As if I was your turtle or something?!" Killua feigned utter hurt and annoyance

"No , I didn't mean-

"well I WANT MY CHOCOLATE" He specified with clarity.

Gon exhaled smiling because Killua appeared to be his usual self. But his trail of thought was swept away by the vicious attack that pushed him to the floor.

Tickles.

The tanned fought back fierce, biting his lip to stop the giggles- he would not be ticklish! No! No! NO!

"STaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaahp I GIVE UP I GIVE UP"

Gon continued to laugh madly as he was cruelly, viciously tickled until he gave away chocolates and candy.

Killua, now hovering over him gave him an intensely smug look. His fingers twirled a chocolate candy. In a cat grin he unwrapped it immediately and tossed it into his mouth. Gon couldn't help the warmth that crept to his cheeks as the ex assassin threw himself to the bed on his back, triumphant.

Killua closed his eyes, now devotedly concentrated on tasting the chocolate in his mouth with delicacy and not the pain to his wrist. For some seconds there he'd totally forgotten about the whole incident. With the two things he was most fond of a meter away from him, it wasn't hard to get distracted.

The savoring augmented by his hunger. He was freaking starving. He stuffed bonbons three at a time as he busily thought on what were to be his next movements in regards to all...

Without knowing, Gon like a voyeur watched him curious. Killua, staring at the roof intensely, almost automatically extended his hand.

"Mooooooore"

Gon gave him another bonbon, still curious. Killua looked at Gon from the corner of his eye

"I promised a trip on boat to the islands nearby"

"Yeah, but its ok if you don't want to-"

"let's go! I promised" Killua had suddenly bounced of bed, ready.

"You mean it? You want to go out?"

"Yup"

"WOHOOOOO!"
Killua snapped his fingers for another candy and Gon tossed him one as the kid spoke with his mouth full "Where should we tour off?" But then Killua's brow creased and swallowed "We have to consider the time... like, it's really late thanks to me" He pointed himself impatiently, natural-born dexterity to hide the bruising with a pull of his sleeve.

But Gon, pulling one of his boots from under the bead was speaking excitedly without a care in the world "No, no, its perfect! I'm telling you exactly what we are going to do: when the moon comes out, there are some tiny fishes that sparkle in the dark on the nearby island. I guess they're kind of fluorescent" Gon eyes lit with curiosity. "We must see them"

"Then let's get out! I don't care how late we return"

Yeah, Gon's contagious enthusiasm never failed to steal a smile from him. And suddenly he felt ...like...

Yes, like the normal kid that he wanted desperately to be at the moment. He'd do whatever only to leave the ship right now to before...

But all was going to be fine, he repeated again and again and Gon's smile had to be a good omen-he would not drown in anything ever again-He'd promised that to himself so long ago...

Suddenly Killua's hands were empty of chocolates. He lifted his head in realization.

"Hey Gon, uhm...I know you still have chocolate in you pockets, and you're not even touching it. You do know you can eat chocolate too, right?"

"...no I don't... really? "

"...Don't make me regret the offer. It won't happen again"

He could see Gon's "YAY!" face without the need to look. The tanned boy then unwrapped a candy for himself and tossed a bonbon to Killua. The boy caught it blindly as he prepared their backpacks.

Someone watching them from the window would have surely thought "What a terrific team they make"

But in the hunter world of predators and preys, the one really observing them hadn't thought that-though he would bet on it with riddle-like eyes. He'd been far more original since birth... His thought bubble was most assuredly laced in clovers and hearts.

x.x.x

The height of the moon spoke it was well into the night.

"But how come those fish have light inside?"

A little boat could be seen barely into the night, at the horizon, with two kids returning.

"I mean... they don't have any metal guts do they? And yet I could use them as a lamp, bright as they were! We saw that in a Big Bang Theory episode, remember? Where Sheldon invented a lamp with fish alike the ones we saw... but I never believed it possible!" Gon spoke crazed.

Killua grinned staring at the darkness. Remembering Gon's face in front of the fish, each one lit in a different fluorescent color…
Priceless. For everything else you got a Huntercard.

He tried to explain. "I think I heard Kurapica telling Leorio this part yesterday- on how those fishes feed on a mix of two different algae whose compounds mix on their belly and do chemical wonder that light those little fish from inside."

"Is that possible? Having chemicals do light?"

"Yeah, it's like those bracelets they give you at adult parties" Gon looked lost. "Or... like glow worms! You've never seen glow worms back at Whale Island?"

"Oh definitely! But I thought those glowed because of a nice story Mitosan used to tell me" Gon smiled cutely.

"A kid's story?"

"A story Mitosan used to-

"Everyone knows kid's stories are fake" Killua laughed cruelly.

"NO! That is not true" Gon was effectively provoked.

"Yep, they are"

"You didn't have a childhood, how would you really know?" Gon raised his head defiant.

"Ouch!" Killua laughed

"I speak with informed knowledge"

"You might be right, but I played a trillion video games when you had never heard the word play station. So if I say all of children's stories are fake, it's because they are"

"But were you told ever a fake kid story when little?"

"Have you ever played mortal kombat?"

"Yeah, with you, at Aunt Mito's"

"Oh... right- Well, that doesn't make any of those stories any more real"

Suddenly Killua felt something slippery cold hit him on the head and fall into the water.

"Hey! You threw me the fish I caught! With all my effort and-"

Another fish hit him on the head.

"STOP THROWING FISH AT ME"

"This time I threw you the one I caught so we'd be even" Gon was happy to explain

"How you throwing fish AT ME would possibly be fair?"

Gon laughed heartily because he knew Killua had a thing about dead fish. He stared at the small coloured sardine-like-creatures that laid at their feet lifeless. They'd once had glowed in colours. He felt young, too young. But since before his license he'd been a hunter...
"It seems those stories are important to me. They remind me of Whale Island and Gonta and Aunt Mito" He spoke dreamily...from a time where he'd been far more naïve than he was now.

Killua stood quiet some seconds...

"...I know they are" The silver-haired boy tilted his head and the waning moon flecked some of the silver strands. "That's why I tease you" He said with warm eyes.

Gon was lost in them for a second. As he suddenly let out smiling..."When they told me about my father, and this world inhabited by Hunters, with strange beasts and adventures... that did sound like a child's story too" Gon beamed "If you want I can tell you the glow worm story someday..."

Killua seemed entranced. On Gon's eyes danced the faint light of a lamp they'd been carrying...

"I want to hear it now... I bet it's an awesome story" And there you could hear the voice of an ex-assassin's now bright. And he added "Besides it'd be the first kid story they'd ever tell me I think!"

"Awesome! Well it starts like-"

"GOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOON!"

"KILLUAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAA"

They heard callings faraway from the main ship.

"WE'RE HEEERE!" Both boys screamed back

"It's them!" they could hear Kurapica shriek.

"YOU LITTLE BASTARDS!" The distance wasn't a problem for them to guess how mad Leorio was "ForGIN'S SAKE WHERE WERE YOU? We were worried to death!" He yelled back like a mother hen.

"Killu we're in trouble" Gon whispered

By the time they'd approached the ship and were able to climb to the deck, a really mad Leorio and a resigned Kurapica awaited them almost pacing.

"YOU CAN'T JUST LEAVE TO SAIL IN THE MIDDLE OF THE NIGHT! You go, yeah, like two little stupid...GIRLS that go out to a stupid PARTY. Don't you THINK- WHAT IF a STORM COMES AND DROWNS YOU or I don't know PIRATEES TAKE YOU AND CHOP YOU TO PIECES! YOU FOOLS!"

"Well he definitely looks like the one who's going to chop us to pie- Killua was murmuring to Gon when Leorio lifted him by the collar of his shirt incensed

"YOU DAREDEVIL-how dare you!"

_Hands._

Killua missed his breath. He had suddenly felt dead. All color left his face.

"Leorio leave him! Poor kid you scared him!" Kurapica went and took Killua back from Leorio's grasp.

"You really believe he's scared? Come on Kurapica, its Killua! He's just playing innocent!" And
they continued to babble into the background of his mind, as Killua tried to gather his thoughts.

Oh, but could not think the right way... he tried to follow the conversation but lost himself... he felt bad again, he was again near Him- No. Close it. Don't think of this, it's not the right time, protect Gon and close it but suddenly he felt so much colder, at that so-real threat, a so known ominous sinking feeling, the dark eyes-

"Killua snap out!" Kurapica had literally waving a hand in front of his face. And so in delay Killua realized he'd been frozen.

"Uh?" He found Gon and the blond observing him concerned. "Sorry" The boy pushed a strand of hair away from his face on reflex. Kurapica frowned

"Killua, what happened to your wrist?" He was quicker than what the boy was able to react. Killua tried vainly to snap his arm away, exposed the large bruise and swelling. A beautiful trail left of the dislocated wrist twelve hours before but that story didn't need to be the official one.

Gon's gaze fell to the floor in front. He'd been meaning to ask Killua... But from the way he'd tuck his sleeve it seemed that the boy did not want to answer that question, so...

"Wow, I honestly hadn't noticed at all" A skilful cool voice replied easily lying "It must have been while swimming with this blockhead"
Gon was silent. He just watched his friend with a curious expression.

"Oh I'm hungry, let's get inside" He tried to waved Kurapica off again, but the blonde did not let go, examining his wrist.

"It's bad. This needs at least ice and checking. Do you know if it's broken? It must be really painful. How did you hit yourself so hard?"

"See! That happens when you go out unauthorized!" Leorio claimed just as Kurapica lifted a bit more Killua's sleeve. This one practically slapped the hand away. Kurapica looked startled.

"Don't worry captain. It doesn't hurt one bit".

Kurapica was off-set. But then he lowered his gaze humble.

"Sometimes I forget who you are, I'm sorry" He apologized sincerely "But I'll still bring you the ice" He suggested concerned. "And you both look really tired! We should all go eat inside something nice"

"Yeah... I prepared dinner" Leorio murmured "But you know guys... really, don't just ran up like that, we really do care for you-"

Suddenly Gon looked up at Leorio and... hugged him. Yes. Killua was a bit daunted "I'm sorry Leorio-san! Thank you for worrying about us!" He said with the sweetest smile. Killua tried to echo his friend as best he could

"Yeah, dude. Really sorry... we did not think-"

"But you're not our parents"

Gon had stated simply, his eyes smiling at Leorio as he stood again.

There was a dead on silence as all of them looked at Gon.
Leorio finally stuttered

"I know! OF COURSE WE ARE NOT YOUR PARENTS! BUT you can't just go and-And we can't just- I mean you-you!" You stray kids, where the hell are your parents then ah? No one, NO ONE is looking after you! Someone should! Leorio was at a loss of words though he most dearly wanted to rant something along those lines. Gaping as if a fish out of water he finally concluded sighing

"Ok, so... we are not your parents, no one has ever suggested the possibility, that'd be weird but … you still should tell us where you are going to disappear to if something happens. Aren't we a team?"

Leorio raised his hands.

"You're right" Gon approved slowly. "Yes, you are completely right. We are a team! We'll warn you next time we're out until too late or if we're up to something." Gon promised "You could come along with us tomorrow! We're going to Pandora"

"Oh, no, tomorrow we're going to see the fluorescent fish the captain talks about" Kurapica pointed out interested

"We JUST saw those! They're AA-MA-ZING" Gon jumped up and down

"Come on, I got dinner, I bet you'll like it" The blonde smiled at the group as he inwardly sighed with patience. This group had serious ADHD problems.

Gon could not stop talking about how he'd seen the magic fish and what with the beautiful scenery, the colored birds and the white sands and the fluorescent fish again. He dragged Killua inside while laughing at one of the stories he was telling.

The silver-haired boy couldn't help noticing...Illumi was nowhere on sight. Killua felt some hope and tried to chatter, he was an expert. He just needed time to think. But that was for late night pondering.

It was all wishful thinking

He'd fallen asleep immediately. But it was the longest night ever. It'd been a long day, and now nightmarish dreams slowly began to mix and plague his mind. In an increasing tempo all the images blurred like a grotesque collage: beautiful light bulb fish with honey eyes and wind chimes laughter, chocolate tickles... and an iron grasp along two obsidian dark dark dark eyes... the sense that he couldn't move...the paralyzing fear...and the sense that he was falling falling...endlessly.

Chapter End Notes

Read and Review!

Now a Poll: In your respective countries, what is the normal age to leave your parent's house?

A psychological hug to whom answers :)
That was the only word that could describe the inability to breathe, though he would never admit it. There was no apparent reason. He was in front of a locked door, with the vague notion that someone on the other side was in danger.

He turned the knob. With a deja vu feeling he’d done so before. He struggled against that doorknob as if someone was coming for him, though no one was. But he had to open it, he had to— and he saw his own small hands struggling with the great handle.

Only then he heard the piercing scream from the other side of that locked door.

And that voice. It was so, oh so familiar it hurt-

"NO"

He now aimed at breaking the handle. But it would not budge. And the screams were getting louder.

"No! NO!"

"I’ll stop if you beg"

Killua stopped.

Those words chilled him to the bone. He knew their owner.

"I-I beg you, please don’t – no – noooo PLEASE"

He was now fighting desperately against the locked door, clawing, kicking, hitting, OPEN FUCKING RETARD – his fists were punching the wooden boards but his struggle was drowned by the terrified voice screaming to the top of his lungs.

BAM

The broken door fell to his right as he rushed inside. A dark figure was lifting a boy against the wall, its limbs strapped to electric wires.

Black bottomless empty eyes turned to stare at him.

"Have you missed me, brother?" He spoke as he laid a slender hand on the victim’s neck. The boy was shaking his head, screaming, his eyes puffy on the tears-

Only then realization hit him:

Black spiky hair, tanned skin. Two honey eyes locked to him as if betrayed.

GON!

Killua woke up in the scream... He looked wildly at his side. Gon was breathing evenly and
smoothly. Killua fell to his back and inhaled deeply.

He counted to ten, just to ease his heartbeat.

GOD

That had been scary.

That had been deranged- shoot- your- brains- out- scary

Killua shut his eyes tight. Half reliving that scream, half wondering how had it felt so real. He stared at the clock on the night table.

5 am.
He exhaled with patience.

Trying to fall asleep was a senseless rebuff. After the ninth toss-and-turn he finally admitted he wasn't able. He sat up and left the bed, like a ghost sorting around their familiar mess barefoot: The week-old pizza cardboard, a sprawled Catan game, inside-out T-shirts everywhere, just literally everywhere. Gon's fishing rod poked out from under chocolate wrappers and his own hoodie. He painfully stepped on one of his yoyo.

He found soon their miniature fake Star Wars sword and made it glowed.

Yeah... they had a small Star Wars sword that glowed.

Gon's birthdays were an awkward experience for Kurapica and Leorio. Actually both their birthdays in general were just plain awkward- As if none of them but Gon had ever learned to make presents. Or actually been in a proper birthday party.

So for Gon's last birthday, Kurapica gave him a green T-shirt. It was actually not bad. And Leorio gave him...

well this.

Miniature Star Wars sword. Miniature Star Wars glowing sword. Gon hadn't even known what Star Wars was. And so Killua downloaded the saga, for them to see in their tent. And they had. They'd been in the middle of the woods, eating roasted chestnuts and enjoying a trustworthy netbook battery. He got to see with surmounting delight Gon's bulging eyes when the epic "I am your father" scene came up.

Good memories.

He himself had come up with a present for him quite easily: a set of beautiful professional fishing baits. Gon used them regularly- Which somehow made him feel a degree of self-righteous satisfaction.

But the silence brought him back to the dark corner of the room where he sat.

It was 5:15 am now.
And he could not sleep.

After some time alone in the dark, dwelling on even darker thoughts, he finally stood fed up, with the intention of just wandering outside to explore on his own.

He left Gon a note and took the sword with him- It was their only flashlight. Even though he felt
absolutely ridiculous carrying it.

It'd been two hours where 120 minutes of his life were wasted. Walking on his own, a the cold breeze down his nape had always helped him with strategic planning.

Not now.

He needed a solution. Soon.

No reasonable answer came. Too lame, too rash, too suicidal, too weird, too coward, too unreal.

Nagging him was another smaller issue. It shouldn't be occupying RAM in his head but it was, it kept popping into his mind like publicity malware. He disliked the idea of putting the issue into words, but...what... two months after he met him? The day after? The extent of how...how much he cared for Gon. He did. Of course, years after and he knew it was better not to question it at all, he...had lived happily by Gon's side, receiving the sunlight.

...He'd never thought that care could be used against him. That old-old-old thought of how Gon would be better-off without him. That possibility had always been this dark paranoia, the far-fetched fear. Now it was beginning to settle around him as a dreadful possibility. And yet it would tear him irreversibly just to try to leave him. 

That's how he just stumbled with the cave.

As his thoughts carried up hill and down hill their boulder like that greek character Sisyphus, he'd been lazily wondering the deserted island. He felt he was going to drive himself insane... He tried to concentrate in his surroundings by default.

Kurapica would have said something about the unique topographic formations-lots of caves and peaks and risky cliffs. Almost no living fauna...

He felt empty. He knew he was very independent but hell he wouldn't be able to travel on his own and leave-

Focus.

All covered by moss and the roots of this giant slouched greenery that grew on the islands: Salty-water-willows, beautiful like the ones lulling Ophelia to sleep in the paintings. Dad had taught him that. Dad had taught him all that. All.

He felt empty.

Just like any other cave, he'd entered carrying only the star wars glowing sword. Feeling like a misguided ghost.

It took him one full hour to reach the cave's end and back, only accompanied by his weird shaped flashlight. Illumi could have very well been there, and he would've been defenseless. He'd done the trip just out of curiosity. Or numbness. Not one goddamned solution he thought when amidst the dark, he tripped into such extraordinary vision he was misplaced of all brooding. They were now equally replaced by awe and the tingling sensation he had to share this with someone.

Soon he was by Gon's side of the bed, waiting for him to wake up, almost too eagerly. Even in sleep Gon felt observed and eventually rolled out of bed. Soon he'd put on the boots of his natural springy spirit.
Killua brought Gon to the cave, and Gon excited went for Kurapica who was followed by Leorio to stare at...

This huuuuuuge wall covered in ancient drawings he'd found inside!

Killua was the head of the Indian line, the place snaking down; the roof getting lower. He still followed his glowing sword though Kurapica carried a decent gas lamp.

The narrow walk became abruptly a wider space with higher ceilings. And Killua instantly turned to his friends, opening his arms, his white teeth almost glowing in the dark out of self-satisfaction.

"Tadaaaaaaaa!" He waved at the stone walls.

There was a silent moment of awe. Approval of his findings were immediate.

"This is amazing!" Leorio adjusted his glasses.

"Aint I the coolest hunter ever!" Killua pointed the glowing sword at himself with a triumphant expression. *Gon, you just look! I can swell at every job I dooo-oooo!*

"I recognize these" It was Kurapica's voice.

A different kind of silence settled.

The blonde was pale under the gas lamp. His hand hovered over the walls...his fingers tracing the patterns without touching them, as if afraid they would fade.

"This...I'm almost sure...this nomad tribe, friendly to the Kuruta made them. They probably lived once here, in this island. I can't...remember their name...I was so young..."

Gon's eyes were lit in huge wonder. The room was pitch dark but with the gas lamp they could see part of the grandiosity... The intricate drawings covered all the walls and ceilings in bright colours that seemed to defy any ageing process.

"But isn't here, Caribbean islands, far from where you kind of lived?" Leorio asked.

"And you know where we lived because...?" The icy cold reply left them again in silence.

"No, I just assumed..." Leorio mumbled uncomfortable. He didn't actually know where the Kuruta lived, he just had a nudge it was some place like the highlands...

"Well, as I said, this was a nomad tribe." Kurapica continued as if there hadn't been a threat on his voice a second before

"I remember being small and talking to them... they were trying to teach me... " He trailed, examining the paintings, his expression half concealed by a long past memory. "You see, they strongly believed they were habitants of the world. Their nomadic life consisted on attempting to travel the entire earth, to try and see it all. Because of that, they would stay for two years in each place, and then move on."

Killua was now resting his back against the cold stones, staring at the high ceilings of patterns painted.

"That makes sense..." He said to himself without realizing he'd spoken out loud. As his friends stared at him he explained "Well... it's clever, their endeavor." He paused. "You know, this human need, to see everything; yet a human span of life is by nature short...but... a culture is a different
thing because it outlives any individual and...crap like that..."

They were staring at him as if he was dressed as a dinosaur. Not Gon. Gon seemed like weirdly proud.

"Uhm... forget I ever spoke and do us a favour"

"No, Killua. You got exactly what they were thinking, and quite fast" Kurapica replied confidently to the boy who looked down a bit abashed.

"Have you ever wondered how it would be to read all the existing books in the world? Or learn all its languages...Or see all the world's lakes and mountains...? Humans are naturally drawn to know it all. But experience is infinite. We can't".

But then Kurapica lifted a finger. "However as Killua noted, a culture outlives the life of each member. It will ritually bid farewell to the elder while welcoming the new one to the traditions. And so the strive of this tribe is clever, they would travel endlessly, for years on end, registering and recording the world for the ones to come... By grasping the concept of culture they got closer to the humane attempt of seeing all...That's what you were thinking no?"

Killua nodded shy. He'd thought just that, but his mind words didn't have the grandiosity of Kurapica's speech. With pride he admitted he sucked at expression.

"That's so awesome!" Gon brightened "Then maybe this tribe one day will manage to visit the entire world...and truly posses the claim of being inhabitants of the world-and-and-and even though each person won't, as a culture they will actually see it all!"

His enthusiasm echoed through the many crevices and fissures of the rocks surface.

"...No... They won't"

There was a silence. And they'd all turned their heads to stare at the blonde, except for Killua. He remained slouched, nonchalantly staring in front. He had intuition for this kind of things.

Kurapica left the lamp on the floor.

"That tribe was annihilated... also..."

And the air was dense and heavier, the sole meaning lowering their four brows.

Kurapica did not feel comfortable at all in the tense atmosphere he'd unintentionally cast. He tried to lighten it somehow...

"Well... even cultures have a beginning and an ending".

It sounded miles ahead better in his head.

"I just...can't remember their name..."

A chunk of meaning falling like a concrete block on his head- Cultures did end, however glorious. They died with the life of the last descendent. And with him all they'd known...Rocks were the only thing that could be left. Music, laughter, songs and stories, their real history, their existence gone. And as usual he felt his feet weigh a hundred tones, rooting him and tilting him forward. As if he carried something too heavy on his shoulders.

Killua meanwhile slowly slouched down the wall at a distance from the group. Without looking up
he could read what went through the blondes' mind in those two seconds of silence. And he felt a bit wretched. He squared his shoulders cool... but it was it wasn't exactly easy to be an ex-assassin when they spoke of murders. He'd always thought their friendship, that... thing that made Leorio and Kurapica come for Killua alongside Gon after the hunter exam. Well, some corner of his head thought it had nothing to do with him- he was not a good person; but that it had to do with Gon.

That was the reason they accepted him. They were Gon's friends... not his. But they seemed at ease at his presence. He did not demand anymore.

Now why Gon had chosen him as a friend …that was beyond quantum physics.

Meanwhile Leorio just felt helpless as usual. He just didn't know how to react. Or how to reach

"It's quite a thing…” Gon had broken the silence waking up all of them from their dark brooding.

Even the silver-haired boy timidly lifted his head. Gon smiled and faced Killua directly

"Humans life span is by nature short no?" Gon used Killua's words as he raised the gas lamp to stare at the drawings "But then we stumble upon these and I think that it's quite a thing that humans, when they can't do it, not even for themselves...then they go ahead and create things that outlive them."

They boy's expression made everyone fall into a different kind of silence. One of reverence.

"Their story, it's all in here." Gon's open hand posed on the wall. "It's left for others to piece out- And what's even more amazing is that I believe this people painted these drawings in full knowledge that once they left, it wasn't meant to be stared at by them again"

The boy whispered, almost as if it was a secret. He inhaled in restrained eagerness "...We're so lucky..."

Kurapica nodded... with fondness "We are ... yes...we are"

That's when Killua realized it. In those brown honey eyes was lit a fire that could achieve the biggest things: lead the mightiest revolution, unleash the greatest storm and lit an entire city in the dark... yet calm the saddest sea. Rest assured you will find Gin. There wasn't a trace of doubt... It was an epic revelation and he desired to tell Gon so. Gon... was the real hunter...

… Who else to call to brighten the mood uh? Kurapica was smiling too. He put a hand on the spiky haired boy's shoulder. Gon turned eager

"How old is it?"

"They're 200 years old approximately"

Wow…

"This is so cool" Gon whispered. All were staring in amazement at the colorful drawings.

Being in the dark, in the mists of the crossroads of time…The four together.

It had been truly exciting.

"Oh young man, no! drinking rum doesn't make you fat ! It makes you lean! ...against counters, bars, chair, tables and poles" The almost rumbling laughter was accompanied to a lift of his mug, as the captain cheered to the setting sun.
"Oh isn't drinking an honest way to end one's day?" The captain was trying to encourage them on drinking tea with rum. He'd contributed to the adventure of the cave- he knew the legends involving all the chains of islands and this one as well. And he possessed a low bass voice that assembled them in silence.

He told about people who once inhabited that small island, that very same island, dear, didn't it seem so deserted and ugly, such a silly little island, not half the proper size. But that cave, it was glorious. Hidden from the tourists and their hive-mind and photos sessions, hidden like it ought to be, the captain spoke, there, splendid, glorious…

They'd been annihilated ruthlessly by the phantom brigade seven years earlier than Kurapica's own clan if you did the mental calculation. Of course no one dared to comment this last fact to the captain. They all just stared in silence at the blonde- who was at the moment apparently interested on his cup of rum-tea.

The captain rambled on how it was a shame to annihilate a clan that was more than 500 years old, and how they'd been finally caught in their nomad travelling very far from that island, and how many other tribes had suffered the same destiny, because there were people out there who thought murder was fun and organ trafficking high profiting.

Killua sipped rum alone, removed and expressionless.

Kurapica had stayed quiet the entire time. He would only interrupt from time to time to ask politely for more stories.

That night, after brushing his teeth and getting a shower, Leorio came into the room he shared with the Kuruta to find it empty.

The doctor sighed. He wouldn't be back in the time being. It was useless to go searching for him...
He knew the guy wouldn't let anybody near.

And Leorio wondered why, after being an accomplished hunter and doctor, he still felt like this... alone and empty.

"Shhh, not too loud or they'll scold us!"

The Star Wars sword lamp was now being used to tent them in their bed, as they lied undercover. They sometimes fell asleep like that and woke up with a dead Star Wars battery.

It'd been an exciting day. They talked about that miniature hourglass they'd found on the beach abandoned before they'd seen the cave. Another rarity added to Gon's captain said it was older, much older than the existence of that tribe in that island. It probably was washed away to the shores, coming from a faraway land…And so they chattered busily as kids should do- on remote countries they would visit just to find from where that hourglass came and pirate stories. All that they would see. All that was waiting for them.

Gon then wished him good night and closed his eyes contended.

...

Killua kept his eyes open in the dark, staring to a fix point in the ceiling. It was quite similar to how cats stare at nothingness-with such a high seriousness, as if inspecting their own existence.

"Killua, you're still there?" Gon whispered
"Yes I am kid" Killua whispered back. Now probably came one of his startling-random night questions so he patiently waited.

"Do you know what you expect from life?"

The question gave Killua mild depression. He usually tried to pass the day without thinking much in that. At the silent hesitance Gon reformulated

"Or…maybe not expect but… do you know what you want from life?"

He knew very well what he wanted. He wanted little. Just being with Gon. 

"...nope" He shrugged. "I'm too young"

"Oh." Gon thought in silence. Killua waited. It finally came... in a murmur, as if a confession.

"Killu...is it wrong that... I think I do know what I want from life!" Laying in the bed Gon opened his arms.

"You know how many people want money, like, lots of it…or to be famous! Or to have a career that will make them known or powerful…To rule a country, or..." And Gon had again fell in that old habit he had, of tracing unknown patterns in the air as he spoke. "Well, I think they need those things to be happy… But I found I don't want any of these. Is it...weird?"

There was a silence

"Oh no, is it too bad?"

The silver-haired boy felt amused.

"No. Actually it's really cool. I guess that means you're original. What do you want then?"

There was a brief silence, where they could hear the sound of the sea and each other's low breathing.

"I can't deny I still do want to pursue my father"

"Of course"

"And that's not original" Gon added "But…" He shrugged gazing dreamily at the sound of the waves. Somewhere out there was Gin...

"But... I think I'm already happy." His voice had lowered to a whisper "I think I'm happy because I'm with you. I'm happy doing anything when you are there, I'm having fun! I feel like I don't need anything else. I don't need to be rich. I don't need to be famous. I don't need to have a normal life. I'm happy" Gon concluded with a wide smile "Thank you!" He smiled at Killua.

Killua looked stunned.

The boy had not been able to follow anything since the first statement. Gon's outspoken sincerity, his simplicity, his reasoning, his glowing expression as he lied on his back and struggled to take out his left sock with the toes of his right silver-haired boy was befuddled to his inner core. He shook his head

"Don't speak like that, it's embarrassing!" He knocked Gon's head annoyed with strength and an abashed tone. He even felt slight anger.
"But it's true! Ouch what did you do that for?" Gon punched him with a smile. A **smug** smile. After light struggling, and tent attempt over -Faky star wars word sent flying somewhere- Killua flopped on his pillow to stare at the ceiling of their room again serious.

There was a small window there that led to the skies above.

"... It's cool though" He finally muttered.

"Really?" Gon whispered.

"...Yeah. We have the same plan"

Gon beamed at the distant starry night, right up their sprawled bodies, on that small patch of window in the ceiling.

Killua spoke to the ceiling"...Well...you are the best friend I've only and ever had..." Killua closed his eyes gratified "Aaaaand also the best person that I've known… I'm lucky to have met you" He stated serious and then he stretched widely closing his eyes.

Gon liked so much that Killua's closed eyes were like those of a pampered cat

"You know you are too, no? The best friend ever" Gon chirped.

In the darkness Killua frowned. The assertion came clad in a veil of self understood irony. You know, as if he could be somewhat similar to the kindness Gon radiated. He wasn't the best friend ever. He logically concluded that the mistake was due to Gon's absence of other friends his age.

"Neh, you *are* idiot" Gon spoke, his eyes still closed, second guessing him.

*Was it the silence?* Killua sighed and-

"Ouch! What was that for!" A vexed spiky haired boy protested at the clean smack to his head.

"Nothing in particular" Complete poker face

Gon tried to scowl but failed, chuckling against his will.

"Shhh you'll wake the other rooms" Killua chastised. Half laughing himself.

Gon closed his eyes with a wide grin. Killua observed him and mirrored him… he did feel...at peace. Like he could finally, finally sleep…

"Killu"

"Mm?"

The smaller one remained silent. The next came in a whisper

"You were lying."

Killua was whipped to full awakening.

"Before... that bruise of your wrist, you didn't get it scuba diving, did you"

There was this long silence… Killua's silver tongue lying skills had completely abandoned him. It was a repulsive feeling, that of when you're caught in a lie.
That of being unable to speak.

Gon turned to look at him. Catching the second of turmoil on those violet eyes before Killua looked away. He opened his lips and closed them.

Gon exhaled amiable "It's Ok. Really. I won't ask." He assured his friend. "But... I wanted to tell you that... I just know when you lie" Gon gave a little laugh. He felt slightly guilty. A second ago Killua had seemed so peaceful. And hyper-him had to go and stir things up because he just couldn't hold what he'd been keeping in his chest and now there was this awful silence.

Killua inhaled sharply. And he turned to look at Gon, his face set like a mask, with a faint smile.

"Thanks"

"Why?"

"For not giving me away back then to those mother hens"

Then came this silence... Killua seemed unable to add something more, lie or truth.

Gon nodded, half giggling at the adjective, half giving it a rest...

In his inner core Killua was thanking Gon so much for not asking. He suddenly felt a spout of admiration. Gon knew him even to the extent of knowing when not to ask, knowing when Killua wasn't able to answer.

He now rested so near he could feel Gon breathing. He decided he'd left the debate on whether he deserved this for later. He now wanted badly to just enjoy Gon's proximity. His warmth.

Slowly he allowed everything to fade to blackness...

He tried.

But he couldn't. He dreaded tomorrow. He dreaded it and he could lie to everyone fine, but he could not lie to himself. He thought and thought and thought how he could have avoided all. What had he done wrong? What was the escape? what would Gon do on his place-no, Gon should never be in that place-never ever ever ever- And the replay ran in front of his eyes.

Chapter End Notes

Read and review if you can, will, or wish to make me happier.
Hey guys! I promised I would warn you on the nature of each chapter's content. Here is me being true to my word. The chapters before have been quite-Teen and even General rating. I would rate this one definitely Explicit. So…

**WARNING:** There's adult language and adult situations. There is violence and abuse... And the way it's written may upset you, after all we're talking about a thirteen year old. It's the purpose though. I want to portray the complexity behind these subjects. I'll be descriptive so that whoever wishes to continue, can get under their skin. There will be worse warnings ahead so if you don't like it from now, please do not you are a minor don't continue. Doing so is like when a web page asks you if you are under 18 or not and you should answer truthfully.

Now, do feel free to criticize me, I truly welcome the chance to improve. But do not flame me on something I have responsibly warned.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

*It was night. He was alone... tied to a bed. Arms extended. And he couldn't move his head.*

*Fear. He was paralyzed.*

*It was probably because he'd been recounting what had happened that day... All he'd been unable to speak and now he'd fallen into a nightmarish sleep. That's how he knew he was dreaming. Knowing that did not help one bit on how he felt.*

*Wake up- please wake up!*

*On the feet of the bed was a screen that turned to life, and the crackling engine sound made his body jumped in panic. Just then a spidery cold hand trailed his cheek- ugh- but he could not turn to see the owner, only stare at the screen. He had the horrible sensation that someone was standing behind him.*

*And he couldn't turn off the jagged pieces of images.*

*Wake up- wake up!*

*He realized the screen would only play what his unconscious willed it to play because he saw…* Again the locked door. Again the screams. He trying to open the door, kicking it, the vague idea that something in the other side was in awful danger…

*The boy willed the screen to change from channel, he willed it to become something different, something good because he had the horrible sensation someone was standing behind him and he couldn't move. He tossed his head to one side but then a hand gripped his jaw to force him to look forward.*

*And the screen suddenly showed… Gon. Pinned against the wall.*
Somehow seeing it made him acquire a certainty it would come true if he didn't stop it so command your mind. This is an emergency. He had to. But his thoughts trailed to what had happened at the deck that day. That chilling voice, the shadow- "I'm waiting brother..." The boy's eyes shut tight trying to focus. But the screen at the feet of his bed echoed...

'I'm waiting brother'

No...

Followed by the known feeling of terror swelling inside his chest.

No, ok. It's Ok. Be creative!
Will the screen to change. Count sheep! Or count... Leorio's dressed as ballerinas!

Twelve Leorio-ballerinas appeared daintily on the screen in an old theater... One Leorio... Two Leorios... Three Leorios... on pink tutus...dancing happily- Four Leorios... Five Leorios... Six Leorios. But then the theater was shredding down to pieces, burning down, screams and they were all lit alive, the burnt flesh he'd seen so many times in his childhood raw on the bodies discarded over the scenery...

There was one Leorio left, now dressed in a suit, and Killua had to kill him to save himself- NO. He turned back. He was tied to the bed again.

He heard an ice-cold voice- 'Did you miss me Kills'

Killua tried to shift-take control- He commanded himself but he could now see on the screen the captain of the ship elegantly dressed in a white tuxedo, a baton being swung in his hand. He was laughing grotesquely with that low bass tone. "Ladies and gentlemen" He introduced "It's time for tea! The replay begins!"

The replay begins... the replay begins-

The curtains opened and Killua knew he couldn't help but to look at them, knowing they were going to replay it, images of a silver-haired boy, downcast, following behind his brother's shadow... He felt the cold hand clasping his neck. Just as the screen spoke

"I'm waiting brother"

"The replay begins!"

Only...this time, on the screen he was seven. Only seven.

"The replay begins!"

Horrible disjointed images. Displaying at increasing speed. Screams-toss-hand-needle, cut, hands, hair, eyes, hands, images like clouds through running skies-

NO!

The replay be-

"NO!"

Killua opened his eyes. He'd taken a hand to his chest. His heart was beating painfully. He realized he'd bit his lip. He sat on the bed, realizing he was awake. He was panting, covered in sweat. Cold sweat, his pyjamas dampened actually.
The middle of the night and he wanted a shower. He sighed.

Sitting up, he put one foot then the other, against the cold floor. He sat there, on the edge of the bed tired, elbows on knees, head resting on his hands.

So…this was another night were bad dreams would not let him sleep would they? He thought of his dream. Only ten minutes later did he realize- half heartedly amused- it that was possible- that he'd dreamed, along the positively horrid stuff, with ballerina-Leorios. He darkly humored the choice.

…but he wanted so badly to sleep...

He exhaled cold, now creeping up his bare skin made him return to snuggle inside the bed. He couldn't help remembering that day at the deck… He just couldn't.

He'd followed Illumi from a distance. He'd trailed behind.

Tap tap tap down the stairs...

But Illumi had turned and Killua was lifted by his collar and forced against the wall.

"You probably have missed me Kills"

Oh, there it was, his favorite nickname.

"What do you want" Killua tried to seem nonchalant.

"You really don't know?" Illumi's stared at him blankly...Those void eyes...

"Oh let me guess Illumi. You're going to ask me to borrow you money maybe? Or help you taming Mike, maybe even give you advice on chicks and T-shirts, as normal brother do no?" He let out with ease, surprised at his own casual tone, all the while hanging from his brother's grip.

Illumi's impassive mask was not disturbed by the words. Killua just registered a reaction when he was slammed against the wall, probably just for the sake of being hit on his head. Ow, and Killua sighed in his mind. But Illumi's gripped his neck and he was choking. His dark hollow stare engulfing the figure in front as he was left breathless.

"I'm guessing it's not the money…So, is it father?" The boy gasped between choked breaths.

Illumi towered over him, and seemed to smile faintly "No. But there is a t-shirt problem ..." And he almost jolted at the cold hand that slithered under his shirt. He froze. The dark stare horribly drank his reaction. All his muscles had painfully tensed, nails were grazing his chest. Opening buttons of the shirt.

So that was it.

But was it? No, it couldn't be. He'd been expecting just a private message from father sent through Illumi...Or even a threat to go back. This was the threat to go back? No, he should have known - a corner of his brain registered the sick path of those hands-but No. It couldn't be. It never had happened away from home, let alone a public place no, and years had gone by, it couldn't be that...It couldn't-It couldn't-It couldn't-

And yet it wasn't stopping. He was suddenly obliterating everything happening down bellow, averting his head and shutting his eyes tight as he ran calculations in his mind.
"What little brother?" The elder leaned his head dangerously close to Killua's cheek. "You'll pretend you are indifferent to me? Oh so you don't care"

Just as easily Illumi released him and Killua fell down heavily to the ground. The boy didn't falter, his gaze fixed on a patch of wooden floor, quite vexed. He stumbled as he slowly tried to stand up. Come on... For a moment he'd thought Illumi was doing things for real. Seriously, doing this away from home? He wasn't up to pranks, let alone the old games –tortures- he corrected the it was to be expected he concluded, a good way to scare the shit out of him he must have thought. Well he'd succeeded again, good for him.

Standing he pushed past his brother to leave.

"Tell that circus of a family I'm not coming back. You threatening me won't work. Goodbye Illumi"

As soon as he'd spoken he was pinned to the wall.

"Oh. Not finished?" Killua replied harsh.

The force of Illumi's aura suddenly augmented oppressive. One hand reached to Killua's chest, the other immobilized the boy. In a single move he held Killua's arms above his head. Killua did not flinch, startled. He didn't even fight the tight grasp.

Really?

He felt against his neck the heavy breathing, all too real. And it finally sank in. The bastard wasn't stopping. His shirt was open. And he was nearing the waistband of his pants. Killua registered that his heart gave a sick jolt, a nauseous feeling on the pit of his stomach. And the known surge of hate.

"...Don't mess with me Illumi" He let out a murderous whisper. His body arrow tense, ready to attack.

Illumi chuckled and slowed down on that limit, in expectance...His gaze fixed on Killua's eyes...and the elder proceeded to open Killua's belt.

"Illumi, just-what do you want- Don't-" He tried to shake himself from out the vicious grasp

"Don't? Don't what? Don't stop, little brother?"

Killua hissed angered, trying to fight back. In milliseconds he thought of places where to hit Illumi, maybe there was a chance to run. He tried to free his hands with all his might and they trembled with his strength...

But he realized only too late that he couldn't use his Nen. It was as if Illumi forced him to zetsu or something.

The boy did not flinch at the realization, undeterred, defiance running through his veins, boiling in his blood. Strategic thoughts ran across his mind: It would resume on all his physical strength v/s his brother's Nen enhanced strength... so he would not be able to overpower Illumi.

His only way out was taking whatever mistake or chance he had and run.

Illumi left the grasp of his hands to further roam under Killua's now open belt. Killua took his chance, his hand transforming to a claw. But Illumi's eyes seemed to devour him while catching his wrist at the instant.

He pulled strongly.

And something snapped.
"NGGGGHH!" The scream was muffled by Illumi's hand over his mouth.

His wrist was dislocated.

_The bastard._

Killua, not caring about the pain, tried again to tear Illumi away, fight back, make him damage, run. But to no avail, first one hand then the other was pinned against the wall by an invisible force. It kept his arms painfully extended. He was now completely defenseless, immobilized.

The spidery hand slid down his chest, the other still on his mouth, pinning him to the wall... it went lower a muffled "NO", the anger. And Killua was ready to kill given the chance. He still continued kicking violently and thrashing, now sweating because of the effort of trying to free himself. But he was grasped by his neck again.

"Why you make things difficult? Don't you remember little brother?" Illumi monotone unveiled venom. And Killua couldn't help the unwanted memories, he did, he did remember, and he felt his heart hammering against his chest. Illumi's palm was over it, knowing Killua's panic, savoring it. But he wasn't weak, he wouldn't give up, he kicked again trying to free his arms, the veins in his arms marking under his skin with the effort.

"Ah... little brother, I'll make it easier for you... You see, when I touch you, you feel so important no? It's all about you." The analysis had begun. "But you should know you are just a puppet. You must have surely evaluated the situation, and yes, you are rendered nothing else but a puppet... and surely you're not at all the best I've had..." Illumi pressed himself against the slender body of the kid. His hand covering the boy's mouth, his eyes devouring him... Killua could feel him down there – and terror and anger-paralyzing him.

"Killua... Killua..." he hummed "you're just worthless since I took you for the first tim- -.." A punch hit Illumi's jaw. Killua's other hand had freed himself on pure adrenaline strength.

It felt so good.

Illumi's grasp on his neck grew stronger and Killua refused to gag. The elder hit him against the wall hard. He was pressed again by that force to the wall...

"Beg for mercy" said Illumi in a monotone voice. It was an order, as when he trained him. His eyes transmitted danger, menace...

"No"

He was hit against the wall, but Illumi met resolute defying eyes. Killua hated him hated him _hated him_. Illumi's grasp was even tighter. But suddenly his voice grew softer.

"Ah, I might as well leave you here. I have other interests now. You're just an excuse of an old habit..." Toneless murmured words "There's this young boy, black hair, so much stamina" the elder mused, watching as Killua's eyes widened.

"I wonder how it would be to touch-

"Don't you _dare you_ - " Killua hissed a curse as he punched again- and again was caught in midair. No, no, no, not Gon, not him-
"But I dare little Killua" two bottomless black pits stared back at him. And he felt the sickly slow wave of despair drowning his mind. Not Gon... But Illumi proceeded, now with a silkier voice...

"Oh, but I did not know it would bother you brother. I would never do something that does not please you..." He caressed with one thin finger his cheek. Killua closed his eyes as he felt a wave of sickness.

Suddenly he felt hot breath on his neck as Illumi pressed his lips to his ear "You see, I only need something to eat once in a while. It's when I'm out of stock that I start looking for... younger cattle" He roamed again Killua's taut stomach and Killua inwardly flinched at the unwanted touch…

"Let's make it a deal then" he whispered.

Killua realized he'd stopped breathing. Illumi was now opening his own belt.

"Don't… "He hadn't controlled it, he had shut tight his eyes with anticipation.

"Ah ah ah" Illumi shook his head "No Kills, you don't seem to get this. Weren't we talking about a special boy?" His other hand roamed further.

Killua knew what Illumi was doing. If he could speak… but his air was limited under Illumi's grasp... if he could make him believe Gon was not important... not Gon... he never... he vowed to protect Gon always... ugh stop the touching... suddenly he realized something overwhelming he couldn't grasp reached his eyes...It was all there again, anger, guilt, humiliation, the control, the powerless, the helplessness, how he hated Illumi and how he hated himself, he was there again again again again stinging-hurt-again-again-again-

Illumi smudged with a finger the wetness down his eyes- "Killua there's no need" Illumi's lips traced his cheek. Killua kicked tossing his face to one side. He was hit against the wall harder than the other times. No escape... Just like that. A doll, just like- just like that. Weak... powerless. He was trying with all his strength to release his hands, just to punch something out of anger at the realization…

He was being gagged...and the tingling sensation in his fingers and feet from the lack of air just felt like strings that hung him like a puppet...just like that...

*It did not matter.* No, it did not matter...it did not matter...

As Illumi left his neck Killua's body went limp, he suddenly felt numb, hanging from Illumi's arms. Illumi continued to roam his chest and down there, pressing himself where the hem of both their pants were open.

"Don't give me that empty look Killua...Understand I'm doing you a favor here" He felt...Illumi's pressure hard against his thigh... "You'll friend will stay unharmed, innocent and pure as ... let's say white milk” he felt the poisonous words imprinted to his chest as hands covered that body. He tried to block it out. It wasn't that important. It wasn't. It was just touching, nothing more.

"You just have to cast down your head, and comply. Nothing else is asked of you... I'm not messing around Kills, so think wisely this time"

He observed the boy.

His gaze was unmet.

"Answer" The overpowering sick aura. It was sick how he rejoiced in his control, he forced him to accept a deal rather than the empty threat, give him the illusion he was choosing, knowing guilt was a powerful string lacing him to silence, one of the many strings, just a puppet.

He kept silent...
"Answer Kils"

He nodded. Without meeting that sick stare.

The elder smiled faintly "So we have a deal. You've always been...so...obedient." Killua's hands fisted. Illumi caressed his hair placing his hand on his forehead. And he drew his lips to Killua's cheek. He closed his eyes in aversion. No

He posed them on the corner of his mouth, and spoke against his skin "In the end you wanted this" "NO". But Foreign lips on his own forcing him. No... And he willed himself elsewhere... For seconds on end.

Suddenly a sound was heard. Illumi released him alarmed, suddenly attentive of their surroundings. Killua fell with a thump to the floor's wooden boards. It apparently had only been a seagull.

Illumi did not pick him up. He stared at the boy sprawled on the ground. With curiosity. For some moments...

"You are indeed an old vice..." He mused.

There was a silence and he added "As I told you...I'm a busy man and you've distracted me" By now Killua didn't even want to know what busy meant. "We're meeting here the day after tomorrow. At 00:00 pm. Not before, not after. That is the deal. If you so wish I can pay you for your silence"

He rearranged himself... And kept a brief silence. "If you do not appear, I'm personally going to come looking for your friend to give me company. You'll be... tied up while watching." His voice was that dead like monotone, casual as if no real threat was being issued.

...And then he just turned and left.

He just disappeared.

Killua realized he'd stopped breathing…

And suddenly, it all kicked in. Killua got slowly on his feet. He controlled himself, his shaking.

He buttoned his shirt, he arranged his belt. He couldn't control his breathing though, he was heaving… He walked slowly, to the nearest bathroom. He walked away as far as he could.

He felt his hands clammy as he opened the door. He zombie walked to a stall.

He closed the door behind him. And bent instantly. He was heaving.

As he took hold of the seat, he gagged and tried to breathe. He stayed there. Bent over the toilet's seat long after he had no more to give just heaving…

Until he could breathe. Just breathe slowly-

He was not going to be weak. No. He was just overwhelmed lips against his mouth - And suddenly he punched the stall angry. And clenched his fists.

Ugh-Punch- Hate-Punch-BASTARD-Punch- He'd broken the tiles, his fists were burning as he
punched and punched again until he fell to his knees, again panting.

He flushed the toilet… Knelt as he was he'd swayed to the door, leaning against it awfully tired.

He looked at his odd wrist, which still stung painfully. He braced himself for the pain.

A crack was heard.

Back to place.

He took his wrist to his chest, it was cold. And slowly his body edged to sit on the floor. He kept frozen. If he moved, tears would come up his eyes and he was not going to allow that. There was numbness and coldness, the cold of the floor, of the walls, of his wrist…he felt like not moving at all, ever... just staying there hidden and numb, though he felt deadly cold…

He was there again… he had sworn to never ever be in that position again. His fist clenched. Gon in danger. Hate. Hatehatehate. He felt like crying…like killing…he felt dead…

Silence…time trailed and Killua found he'd let himself sprawl against the bathroom floor...feeling the cold tiles as time slowed down…how he ended on the floor? It did not matter... It had not happened.

He only snapped out when his phone cell started to ring, long time after.

It rung… and rung… until Killua finally reached it...

It was Gon's number in the small screen

"Killua!"

...

"Killua is it you? Are you ok?"

No...

"Where are you? Are you alright?"

No...Gon...I...

"Killua! WHERE ARE YOU? And what happened? Where do I go?" the frantic voice snapped him out.

"Too… much… questions" he barely said. His voice was hoarse. Killua breathed deeply, he'd planned it already. He returned to a monotonous voice

"...Hey... cool out...I'm fine. I...

He just needed time to... be himself again...

"...I just need a nap"

"You don't nap"

"Today I do… I probably had too much lunch."

"You didn't lunch... You mean chocolates?"

"…Precisely … so I'm… going to sleep an hour or so..." He wished. He felt the disappointment on
Gon's sigh, as he rambled on. He could just imagine his sad honey eyes "Hey, we can go out later... I promise" He felt drained out, as he left the stall's floor and carried himself to wash his face, then left the bathroom and walked to his room, all the while the cell phone still on his ear with a frantic Gon.

"Killua, can I go there? To our room? Are you in our room? I promise I'll stay quiet... I want to see you" He sounded close to the hyper side of worried. That meant he wasn't pulling a good façade. Well, it was harmless; he was just going to see him sleep. Killua arrived to the room they shared.

"Ok... if you want to, but I'll be boring."

"Ok! Thanks Killua"

He was inside the room now, in the bathroom, and his friend was coming soon... he put a ton of toothpaste in his tongue, water, spit out, zombie mode. Again. Again.

He walked calmly back to the bed. This was not happening. Not...

He let himself fall on the mattress, and unconsciously tugged his legs in. Dizziness along with drowsiness kicked in, as if he’d run a 48 hr marathon. He told himself- he almost hummed- ...It'd been just a mistake. Part of him whispered incessantly he was going to wake up the day before this one, when nothing had happened.

Remnants of childhood mechanisms, weren’t they.

Life didn't work like that. No. So he was just left to vow he was going to get out of this soon... It was that or acting as if he didn't mind.

He’d vowed he would not be in a situation like that. Ever...ever again...

But he was so drained from emotions he even felt spared of the self hate.

He tossed and now that limitlessly all replayed and replayed, the sinking feelings returned with the texture of a bad dream. He analyzed all thoroughly...And oh it seemed like a just a nightmare, a badly done horror movie. It was effective. He was lying on the bed, staring at the roof, and he wasn't as spared from the thoughts he'd been trying to avoid.

And hours went by, a day gone and only other one left and he hadn't found a solution. He was only left with... No, he wouldn't ...But Gon... He needed advice. But there was no one but himself to find an answer.

Maybe all of this was his fault because there was no answer. His mistake had been in believing, in hoping all these two years. Him deciding, him taking control and quitting his past and making a life on his own...Allowing himself those kinds of thoughts, it had all been an illusion that now tasted acrid in his mouth. It was. It always had proven that way. He could run away but he couldn't hide and eventually it would catch up to claim him, to bind him, to return him, to twist him and rip him apart. Until he was molded something unrecognizable.

But he couldn't be molded again, not after having met Gon. It was...impossible...A part inside him that was strongly fighting his right to live and be by Gon's side made him feel the pain all the more. He curled as if with the motion he could bottle it inside somehow. He felt Gon breathing soundly oh so near him...

---

Killua!
From afar. Someone was calling him. Overlapped was a voice screaming

Stop it...don't...don't...

"I dare Killua"

Hands. Hands. Hands. Killua! Screaming overlapped... He suddenly realized he knew the voice that screaming was... It was his own.

The one screaming was himself

AAAAAAAAAAH!

Killua opened his eyes with a violent start.

Gon hovered over him, grasping him by the shoulders.

"Killua!"

"Gon"

"You were having a nightmare" Gon's chocolate eyes desperate... But Killua, almost zombie like rolled over barely conscious. He was sleeping soundly again.

"Killua?"

Silence. Gon rolled his eyes. He sighed concerned and turned to sleep.

Chapter End Notes

Yeah...
Thank you for your reviews and inbox, I really appreciate them all! They make my day.

A six year old boy heard from afar his name. But he wanted to remain floating in the darkness. He was really tired... But again he heard that amiable voice calling for him. That of a woman, softly cupping his cheek... as he opened his eyelids against his will.

"Little master Killua"

Startled, he sat up and stared at the kind woman in front. A relieved sigh. It was just Nanny.

"Little master Killua, you fell asleep while taking your bath" He was indeed in the tub, and Nanny had been softly cleaning with lather the bruised and whipped back, taking all the sweat from the painful training session. He was six, and of course he showered on his own... but when trainings got too hard, Nanny would sometimes help and bathe him, like she used too when he was little.

She poured warm water over his head and he felt he could fall asleep right there, that instant. But then two arms helped him out to dry him with a fuzzy towel. He felt with content the soft material against his back... she had warmed the towel previously. Her long curtain of hazel hair fell over her shoulders.

"That's it my boy, warm and dry" she said as she helped him into his pajamas. Sometimes he still had the problem of putting his two legs inside one leg of his pajamas and got tangled.

"Now a warm bed for those sleepy-kitty eyes" She examined the small boy in front with care...

"Oh but first you need to eat little master! And guess what: I've already baked those cookies you like with chocolate chips" she smiled delighted "Don't you think I'm totally spoiling you? Oh, and some warm milk, eh? You have to drink it all if you want to grow into a tall and handsome young man. Tomorrow it's again veggies though!"

"Thanks Nanny!" He chirped, smiling. And sighed. "But I'm not hungry today" It was true. His hands where now on his pajama pockets. He still felt shy when Nanny was so kind with him. She'd been taking close care of him this year, and frankly he wasn't used to being treated so nicely.

"Really? Are you sure?"

He assented vigorously. She was surprised "Not even one cookie? Oh, I know, you must come here and smell them!" She took one of his small hands and led him to his huge dorm where he could smell the enticing chocolate cookies in all the room... and there they were, piling neatly in a nice round plate...But he just couldn't eat, not right now. He decided to say so.

"I just can't eat right now Nanny"

"Why is it little master? Do you feel sick?"
"No. I never feel sick Nanny"

"Of course you never do" She smiled. He nodded emphatically and then explained.

"I don't feel sick; I just feel I'll throw them up if I have any. And they seem too good to be thrown up" He shrugged.

Nanny looked serious. She knelt to be at eye-level with him "Today was poison-training?"

Killua timidly nodded.

She nodded in understanding and suddenly he felt himself being gently lifted.

"Then, it means you've only brave enough, so I'm tucking you personally in bed".

Killua felt the impulse to inform her she was wrong. He'd been told the exact opposite- how weak he'd been- but then he was already being tuck inside his bed.

"but I'm not sick! ok?"

"Of course you are not" she laughed, pulling the covers. It was a huge king size bed. Somehow she thought it just didn't seem right to place such a small body there, the child always slept curled in a small ball at one edge. She tried to refrain from the feeling of endearment. After all the little Zoldick was still her master... But she failed miserably. She couldn't help it. And so she bent forward to kiss his forehead.

"Good night little master" She turned to leave.

"No, wait little Nanny!"

Yes, sometimes he would call her little Nanny because she called him little master. Nanny turned.

"Please…Stay with me" The child looked at her all to pale.

"Master Killua, they get mad at me when I do so! You know…"

He lowered his head and nodded in comprehension. Hiding unsuccessfully his disappointment.

As a servant with her youth at the Zoldick mansion, she prided on the fact she could really handle everything. She'd coped with the horrible training and with the sick family secrets that were slowly unveiled to her. She'd dealt with the evil manipulation, threats and eventual murders of members of the staff, with the pressure of working under the wicked strict rules... But none of them were compared to that of facing those sad child eyes. She could fathom behind them all the...wrongness inflicted.

She sighed heavily. And wore her smile again " Only this last time Ok?"

"Really? Yessssss!" The kid jumped in bed happily. Nanny rushed across the room to tuck him in again.

The little boy turned to look at her, his cheek resting on his hand over the pillow.

"You should leave little Nanny" The child muttered shrugging.

"Didn't you want me to stay little master?" She chuckled
The child giggled hitting his head with his palm "No! I meant you should leave this place someday. You really should someday" Clear and dreamy his child voice floated as he closed his eyes.

Nanny observed him.

"...Someday as in… runaway?" She lowered her head to the boy in a whisper.

"Yup! I think you would be happier. You could stop being a maid, you'd go with your butler and you would be able to marry" He chirped brightly "You could run away somewhere nice and sunny- and- live happily ever after"

Nanny stood silent. She seemed sad, her body leaning slightly against the bed.

"You speak about things that you should not be thinking at your age" She sighed, softly passing a hand through Killua's hair. He'd been told this by many other servants before, but he did not understand very well what they meant. As this seemed more complicated, he shrugged and repeated curious.

"But why haven't you?" His eyes suddenly lit "I could help you..." T.

At this her long eyelashes closed her eyes with a heavy sigh, and she passed her hand once more through his soft hair.

"I can't master Killua. You don't know why?"

He lowered his eyes and shook his head.

"Is it... because it's too difficult to escape? Little Nanny, do you fear death?"

"No, that's not the main reason. But I don't fear death."

"Me neither" the child tilted his head "Then why don't you leave?"

"You don't have a clue?"

"uh-uhn!" He shook his head, with amused grin, challenged.

"Then I won't tell you!"

"Come oooooon! Please Nanny! Pleaaaseee"

"Nope!"

"Please-please-pleeeeeeeeettttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttase!"

She grinned "Ok. But it has to be a secret. You can't tell anyone"

"I promise!" The boy claimed solemn, placing a hand over his heart.

"For you to understand, I need you to remember that book I read to you the other day"

"Which one?"

"The Little Prince."

"Little Prince" He nodded emphatically
"So tell me, do you remember the little fox?"

"Yes! And the giant baobabs"

Then Nanny put a voice as if interpreting a character, something the little boy just loved.

"I am beginning to understand! There is a flower... I think that she has tamed me... " Nanny paused "Well, that's what the Little Prince said... and you remember what the little fox answered?"

Nanny adopted what she believed was a little fox voice, acting "It is possible, On the Earth one sees all sorts of crazy things"

Little Killua had such a beautiful laughter.

"Sssshhh, they will hear us!" Nanny whispered "Well, and do you remember what the little fox said at the end?"

"What did he say? what did he say?"

"Oooohh the best line of the book!" She paused and put her Little Fox voice "Little prince, Men have forgotten this truth. But you must not forget it. You become responsible, forever, for what you have tamed"

The boy listened to the smooth voice entranced.

"So he was very wise, that little fox" Nanny ruffled the boy's head "And so well, I can't leave because there's a little boy that has succeeded in taming me" she explained.

Killua looked up.

"Is that little boy me?" He asked. Nanny nodded emphatically. And his cheek was cupped again.

"Now you know. It is our little secret ok?"

Killua nodded. But he couldn't keep himself from blurting "But Nanny, I'm not allowed to tame anyone, I can't have friends" His child clear eyes stared at the pillow" Nanny I'm a bad boy. You know it. I'm evil" he stated simply looking at Nanny again, troubled.

Nanny chuckled "Do you know what evil means?"

Killua shook his head. He'd just picked it off from somewhere.

"Then you don't know if you are! But rest assured, if you were evil, we wouldn't be having this conversation" she said tenderly.

"Do you think I'm bad?"

"No I don't." she replied with such confidence that it almost erased all the other software he was being programmed all day long. As if knowing so she added "And don't let anyone convince you of the opposite. You just..." and her voice was suddenly thicker... "You just... hang in there until you're able to decide for yourself what you really want to be. You understood me?"

Killua nodded, not sure that he understood, but just soothed to hear her voice.

"Do you think I'll be a good assassin?"
She garnered air and strength

"...Little Master...You can do whatever you want to and in that you'll excell I don't doubt it"

There was a hesitance that he picked up clearly.

"But do you think I could be something different? Like an astronaut"

"YES! you surely can, really. You can be everything!"

That's what they always tell you when you're little. She could read the confusion in the child's eyes, he had been told otherwise. But she kissed his forehead as if to cast all doubts away.

He leant against her closing his eyes.

...

At the eyes of the family, her job was merely to have her master's lunch and clothes always ready. Bathe him, feed him and so.

But they were aware she was also bonding with the boy. And that she was taking care of him in more ways than the strictly necessary. Often she'd been scolded -there was no necessity to be that sugar like. And through gossip, she'd learned that there was indeed quite a battle between family members regarding the effect such nurturing could have on the kid.

However, as the little master seemed to be excelling in all his trainings, promising true potential (they were evaluating him to become the heir) they vast majority thought it hadn't proven bad at all but it rather had been useful.

And she really tried to look after him in almost all the possible ways. Kikyou willingly let her replace somewhat the roles that she displeased, to turn to be smothering present in all the appraising wicked rest... She was part of the members of the family that admired and loved sickly the boy, participating with cold blood in those horrible training sessions...

Nanny sighed...

They had permitted her to continue being around for two more years, that was supposedly the plan. And then she was to be eliminated.

Her life had been such she actually did not care really. There was somehow something stronger for what she cared.

Her life had been traced, horribly maneuvered. That was the destiny of the weaker ones in the food chain...

And the Zoldycks were the Ubermensch, the over man in Nietzsche plan... The family mastered the art of manipulation and deceiving. And she wasn't spared, she'd been an experiment. They had trained her. Psychologically and physically. In the process they'd killed her own small son. They thought it necessary for her to accomplish the job... So she had no other purpose of living. At the moment of such cruel crime she had really thought she was dead. A zombie. And that had been exactly the point...Her only purpose should have been to serve her little master...

But she'd found freedom in that small margin of space given... and such freedom.

Because they could norm her procedures and contracts, but they couldn't really guess how she truly did care for the boy. How she had hid him under her skin...

A freedom and strength she thought not possible now fed her. And so she would trespass all her
strength to this child...

Of all, she would have noticed if there was something off.

"Please!"

"Gon-"

"pretty-please please pleeeaaaase!"

"you're impossible!"

"yay!"

" Still, it would be easier if we took the cruise with Kurapica, Leorio and the rest Gon!" He protested. Gon could be so hardheaded.

"Bo-ring-! The guys are going to look at the glowing fish’ He pointed out. "Aaand besides, it's more advantaruuss!"

"Adventurous"

"Precisely!"

Killua sighed, a smirk curving his lips.

"Ok. Let's go by boat."

"YAY! HORRAY! MY WIN!" Gon jumped over the couch they were both seating in, at the library room.

"Saying 'my win' doesn't help your cause at all"

An impatient Killua replied taping his fingers incessantly on the table.

It was the last day they had left to visit Pandora, the enchanting city (according to books) before they set out into the endless sea. With Internet banned from their room after they tried gettint into the deep web on Killua's suggestion, they were left with no access to regular information. So they'd ended on the library reading about Pandora on the early morning hours.

"Killu! You know Pandora's island is like the last populated place we'll see in like two weeks!" Gon read enthusiastic in a rusty old book about HXH Famous Pacific Islands

"I'd forgotten that. Then there's that chain of floating islands called 'The Sword' with wildlife isn't it?"

"And no human settlements in them..." Gon continued reading.

"And the rarest creatures ever." Killua finished. "Aw-zoomed"

"And there's no other land surrounding The Sword, but seas for thousands of miles." Gon added.

Killua's thoughts trailed... had that been the reason of Illumi's arrival? That he wouldn't be able to escape, being in the middle of the ocean...

"OK! HERE WE GO!"
"Gon, can we be back by 23:00 please? I want to sleep"

"But we always go to bed later than that" Gon pouted but then he frowned worried "You are sleeping too much these days... what if you've got that sugar disease Leorio told you about? It was called...err...dia...diaperitis something-"

"Diabetes. Dude, I don't"

"Diabetes" Gon repeated, to learn it. "But you do eat too much sugar, and you are sleeping a lot- and then you wake me up at night!"

"I don't get sick"

"...I know. But are you sure?"

"It's virtually impossible. I'm wired to be terminator"

Gon sniggered at that to which he received a dry "It's true" Gon pointed friendly "Anyways, why eleven o'clock? Don't you want to go night scuba-diving like the other day?"

"No"

"Really? But you loved it!"

"The water will be too cold."


Killua sighed defeated."Ok…err… Actually no..." He tilted his head "It's really because tomorrow I want to get up early to see the sun rise." He quickly made up. And picked up a book as if he was suddenly interested in it to avoid Gon's eyes.

Gon's voice seemed to sparkle with admiration though "You truly know how to enjoy life don't you?"

Something ached inside Killua. He closed it

"No. My life was pretty boring. You taught me this kind of life." He stretched. He meant it. "Now, I've always wanted to watch a dawn in the middle of the sea." It sounded right.

When he stumbled again with Gon's gaze he heard himself saying "It would be great if you saw it too."

Gon's beamed happily...Then he looked ahead determined, ready to jump at the adventure. But, for a second... Killua could have sworn he saw a spark of a different kind in Gon's eyes, a spark that- well if the silver-haired boy were the kind of person that allowed emotions to show, he would have been knocked breathless.

Out of water, he reacted defensively

"Anyways, being this early with you like makes me want to drown in cold water"

It came out so wrong. And Killua blushed fiercely for one second. It was one second where he was assaulted with the scene he'd just implied, while at the same time he was cursing his own existence feeling highly embarrassed...

Before remembering whom he was speaking to. As expected Gon interrupted his thoughts without a clue about anything sounding bad at all.
"Oh, it's not that early. Back at Whale Island I always woke up with the rising sun. And then I'd just ran off to the shore and jump into the sea. I'm totally a fish" They both had been walking in direction to the deck to where they had left their bags and stuff. There was an inflatable plastic boat there.

Gon echoing his words jumped to the sea, and reappeared beside the boat

"So a fish Neh? That would explain the ugliness. Oh, and the bad odor"

"I don't smell bad! I don't smell at all!" He said and dived again happily.

Killua jumped inside the boat avoiding the water and started to accommodate the food and the scuba diving stuff they were carrying with them for day-scuba diving.

He sighed heavily at the sight of Gon happily swimming under water. Over the deck away from them were Kurapica and Leorio speaking quite privately...and close.

Killua smirked.

And then sighed.

He actually was aching for water too.
The heat made the almost nonexistent perspiration bother him! In a way it hadn't at all a week before, under the same sun.

Yes, it was a known feeling. As if invisible filth lingered like a second layer over his skin.
When that happened, he usually shrugged it off.
Though sometimes it proved hard.
Like now.

Kurapica and Leorio were now waving. Gon was returning the wave happily.
He did not want to acknowledge the feeling. Although it refused to go away, he was akin to the sensation from years past and the best way to deal with it was to shower and not pay attention…
Well, he kind of guessed what would be Gon's next move. So he waited patiently to be thrown to the water…

As he arranged the food he thought…well, Gon was wrong about not smelling at all. His friend did have a distinct scent... a nice scent. Just a bit addictive. It had always helped Killua track his freind when this one got lost of his view. To know his scent like the back of his hand.

He was in these trails of thought when his boat was turned over by a giant fish named Gon. Killua expecting this threw the bundle of food to the deck as he fell in a scandalous splash. His back, his neck, his chest and face welcomed the cold wetness.

"You! I'm so going to get revenge!" said a wet Killua from under the turned over boat, his wet strands of hair flying as he turned to face his attacker. Gon looked at him intently. He seemed so cute when wet...

Killua felt uneasy, a phantom feeling from yesterday but he desperately wanted to laugh. And Gon was laughing badly, like he was going to die of laughter. Killua counter attacked and grabbed Gon's ankles and pulled him. And then he just dived deeply and swam, rejoicing on the feeling of being surrounded by water...Somehow he felt free to just take the shirt and swim and swim with Gon trailing behind…

And finally they got on the boat and sailed happily as ever to Pandora. They started competing on who could sing more game themes. Gon could only sing Tetris and Mortal Kombat. Oh and Mario,
but that was almost culturally induced without his could sing them all- Chrono Trigger, Metal Gear, Final Fantasy (7 and 8), and the oldies like Zelda along with many many more.

But Gon knew sailor songs, which were funny... Actually he could sing also these enchanting mysterious songs that sailors had taught them... Some of these told beautiful stories; some were in weird languages (Killua counted Serbian, Gaelic, Finish and Spanish before he gave up)... it left the albino feeling amazed and completely dumb at his own repertoire while laughing at the same time. Bad thoughts were forgotten for a while.

Pandora, serving its name, was indeed a village full of wonders hidden in characteristic curly streets.

And they encountered so many things! Antique shops with porcelain dolls and old violins, galleries of underground japanese anime shops and chinese all-purpose-technology. On the market you found tents ran by gypsies with spices and linen for sale, and the strangest fruits and vegetables stacked as if nothing; Going further down you encountered old beautiful libraries and then clandestine house museums of dubious reputation with faded pictures and phonographs, yes! phonographs that played blues so so sad the tune itself disguised with the hand of a drunk poet the change of business in the nightly hours...

They couldn't get enough. They oggled all and touched the dusty parchments and chinese lucky cat with the same unending curiosity. And when they ended just walking down the street afte so much they complimented their tour with their brilliant dialogues.

Killua always admired himself how they could talk together for hours on end about the mortality of the crab.

It was getting darker...but when they found a lovely chocolate store, Gon wasn't able to gain the Killua's attention back.

The chocolate store had to take credit though… it was huge and old, ran by two old ladies – one dark skinned, one pale, like black and white chocolate. They perpetuated the old recipes from Pandora's inhabitants to create a rare brand of chocolate which was sublime. From the way they treated each other they seemed like a couple. They were happy and eager to attend them.

Killua was now in the middle of the store surrounded by piles of boxes of different types of chocolates: all of them being neatly arrayed as to distinguish which ones he was taking back to the ship and which ones he wasn't.

The old ladies let him do as he pleased as he seemed to be the client buying the most products. Gon had surrendered at trying to make Killua look at other stores and now was simply helping him not to tear the huge shop apart.

Actually, the taned boy was the one piling neatly all of the chocolates boxes that Killua was tossing into the air while saying:

"This one yeah! this one too! This one mmmm...oh, this one no; this one, excellent! and you dear most-definitely-coming-with-me- This one too!; this one? No ugh, this one's laxative Gon, take it away..." 

"Killua… how are you planning on taking this to the ship?" Gon's expression read doubt.

Killua cat grinned to Gon :3 "I will rent a bus with your money " He gave a toothy grin.

The vein that popped on Gon's forehead was followed by a surprise attack. And all the neatly
stacked chocolate was in two seconds, history, as a frantic Gon now was gagging him- cause he had his limits.-

"DIE!"

But the ex assassin managed to make Gon trip with one of his legs. Before the poor boy could tell, he was scrambled against the ground on his tummy, Killua over him, an arm being pinned to his back painfully.

"Ow ow ow!" And God, couldn't he just get a break, his wrist was a burning hell- But Killua had won.

Gon kicked Killua's back with his legs and gained impulse to lift of the floor pushing the boy away. He petted his tabbed protesting

"You always spend all your hunter money so recklessly! And let me guess, after this we're going to the casino no?" Gon sighed

Killua looked at him, his eyes glowing delighted "I hadn't thought of that! You're brilliant!"

"Well no! We're looking for clues about GIN!" Suddenly Gon spat back.

Killua smiled at this "Gon, that is obvious. I promise you we will" he spoke solemn "I'm just leaving the casino for the night hours"

"You-!"

"Ahem"

The two boys looked up. One of the old ladies that ran the shop was by their side. She was small, covered in wrinkles and dark-skinned, almost the height of the children in front. She had big, brown not-so-gentle eyes

"There are no casinos in Pandora kids! and if so you're not allowed in because you're underage! What do you believe you are you punks, destroying my shop like this? . Anyway, I won't let you ut you pay for all the chocolate boxes that are damaged by your fighting” she sentenced.

"But Old Hag, what do you know about casinos? Probably you've never been in one here-"

Killua was sent to the ground on his back, a cane now pinned to his chest, the old lady staring down mightily

"Don't call me old hag"

"WOW! I'm sorry! I'm so sorry!He's not always like that!” Gon apologized highly embarrassed with puppy-like eyes .

"Berta, don't be cruel, they're just kids”. The other old lady was sweeter looking, with round spectacles across her pale nose and all bent across the counter, looking kindly at the scene the two boys were making. "Boys if you need a van for your chocolate order, there's a renting car service across the corner" she told them kindly. "Meanwhile I'll stack your chocolate boxes again so that when your transport arrives, they are carried inside"

"Thank you!” Killua said happily incorporating. He then faced the brunette old lady in front, looking very serious and contrite
"and I'm sorry old hag for being rude"

"...!"

But Killua was already out the door with a sheepish grin.

Gon hurriedly added "We'll be back in a second with a transport for the order and err…here's part of the money! Will this suffice?" he passed his credit card "I'm so sorry for the mess! Err" He looked at the direction where his friend had fled and he ran hurriedly behind.

Killua outside continued to run so that the dark haired boy could not catch him after his mischief.

He enjoyed bothering him so much! Ok, he had to admit that sometimes... well most of the time he made Gon mad on purpose just to get a look at that fiery determined eyes and feel the rush hit him like a druggie. Wasn't that morbid or at least a bit psychopath of the sort? Well, he wasn't a normal kid. Though he tried hard. Sometimes though he just had to send to hell his attempts at trying to be civil. Or at trying to understand his own psyche. Let alone that particular fixation of yours Killua…

The corner of his mouth curved a little.

He put his arms behind his head, and walked stretching…

He wanted to stay here... He yearned to stay here in this old town with its wonders. Those two old ladies and the gypsies and the chocolates and his friend. Casino or not...actually whatever town would suffice... he was having fun.

He did not want to return to that ship again.

Like Ever.

He felt a blow on his head and turned. Gon was looking at him infuriated. He radiated anger in waves. Killua couldn't help the smirk.

"Why are you like this! I had to pay for your order! After you wrecked apart that poor shop! And called the lady an 'old hag'!"

"But she is an old hag" He said feigning surprise. He felt a punch on his chest

"Don't you have an ounce of manners? What, would you call Aunt Mito an Old hag?"

"Not to her face"

-smack

"Ouch!"

"Pay me!"

"That's what she said" Smug grin.

Gon positively wanted to chop him to pieces. A blow to the albino's heard followed by a tackle and light struggle made a passersby look bewildered.

"Jeez, I'll pay you later!"
"You never do!"

"That's only because you're the best bank ever" Killua winked. It was so true.

"...You're such a jerk! YOU'RE SUCH A JERK!"

"Sorry..."

"...Then you better give me part of your chocolates as interest!"

"That, I'll have to think more thoroughly"

"Oh come on, there's more than a ton!"

Killua's visage was again set in cat grin, probably imagining all the freaking amounts of chocolate. And rejoicing even more at the sight of the angering Gon.

"You're unstoppable" Gon sighed exhausted, realizing once again he was just being provoked out of spite.

They continued bickering and arguing until they were about to rent the mobilization.

When they heard the screams from the corner they had just left behind.

Gon and Killua immediately changed their stance in the second they interchanged looks. And on his inner self Killua became excited: finally some action.

Chapter End Notes

A/N: Meow. Meow. Meow. ...lots of hard work... Review mee... I'm too easily discouraged
Retracing their steps out of curiosity, Gon and Killua hurried to find the commotion was coming from the same chocolate store of the two old ladies. It was now circled by a gathering of people.

A nice redheaded girl in the corner was screaming and pointing

"The shop was robbed by two burglars just now! I saw them! They had guns, poor old ladies!"

"I saw them ran away in a car" a woman with grocery bags pointed North.

"What, you're talking of Berta and Leti?" a man asked "But they're so adorable and faultless!"

Gon immediately entered the chocolate store concerned. He was followed by a hand-in-pockets Killua. Gon could tell the albino was taking all he could from the scene. And quite necessary it was; the shop was a hazard worst than what Gon and Killua had done themselves.

One of the ladies was surrounded by a bunch of people; the other was calling the police worried.

"Are you alright?" Gon gently asked Leti, the kind lady. She shook her head a bit shocked.

"What happened?"

"Oh boy... I'm so sorry! The burglars stole all your order and your credit card!"

"It's ok; don't worry, but will you be alright?"

She lowered her head... "They stole lots of valuable stuff...rare chocolates we won't ever be able to produce again...It was not only the money in the cash desk and all our savings in the safe deposit box! But the secret recipes… They did all in just minutes, there were four of them" she said almost about to cry. "I-I think we'll have to close down..."

"...fools"

Gon and the lady turned their head. A gust of wind closed the door. The albino was Gone.

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It was raining...the skies where streaked with lighter and darker grays...
The eight year old boy could see from the windowpanes of his tower how heavily it rained. Nanny was buttoning his coat. Her hands slightly shook though she tried to hide it.
Killua wanted to...look into her face to search for answers...
But he wouldn't do so. He was being prepared to go on training for two weeks with Illumi. He had a small suitcase ready...and he was just waiting.
He should have been deadly scared. All the week he had dreaded the whole situation...Nanny somehow had dreaded it too, after the incident. Killua closed his eyes at this. Somehow the boy knew it was his entire fault. He tried to think of a way in which he could have been more careful... But his memories of the incident were scarce...

But as Nanny strived with his coat buttons he acknowledged he wasn't scared. Not at all. He was utterly resigned. He felt enveloped in numbness. What he dreaded was that no one could assure him if Nanny would be back... when he returned. He shivered. That thought scared him. That thought paralyzed him.

"Nanny"

"Mmm?" She looked at the child's pale face framed by the unruly silver hair...

"Promise me you will be here when I return. Its only two weeks. I don't want to say goodbye now"

He was prepared already to hear an answer along the lines of "I can't promise something I'll be forced to break" But no, the immediate answer was silence.

Nanny had shivered slightly. She didn't know if it was at such loaded words coming from a child...or at the monotone used when spoken... It somehow resembled in the tiniest bit that of his elder brother's dead monotone... She suppressed a shiver again. Words spoken as if totally detached from the meaning they bore. When they did carry meaning and so strong...

That only hardened her determination. She looked at the child... and took the child's shoulders and shook him gently as she smiled a little, to snap him out of his gloom. The boy looked at her.

"Be scared!"

His eyes widened slightly as he was still being shaken.

"It's ok! You can be scared! I'll tickle you if you aren't scared"

"But I'm not" He wasn't afraid of what was to come. It was just bothersome, that's all...

Nanny's hands fell to her sides. She tilted her head, her hazel hair falling over her shoulder.

"And what if I say you are not going to your training now?" The child eyes widened even more as he was effectively derailed from his apathy. Suddenly those eyes shone a little, as if timidly wishing for hope, knowing that it came at a too high risk.

"Little master...if you do as I say for only this night, I promise you whatever you wish. Could you do so?"

He nodded. And she took the child's hand on her own.

Killua was five blocks away from the chocolate store in a millisecond, on tracking mode.

He soon sensed that the burglars were already far and moving fast, probably in the car. But he was faster. He was already blocks and blocks away from the shop when he spotted them minutes later. Dark green car high speeding down the street. Killua in a second was running at their same speed behind. He could even hear their voices in the car.

It made him sick. They were laughing. About the poor old couple just robbed. How they were
disgusting anyways. Killua now wanted positively to strangle them for their innocent idiocies.

So he jumped to place himself in front of the car, blocking its path.

A screech of wheels. The wheels marking over the pavement. The smell of burnt tire. The car managed to dodge what appeared to be a white haired innocent boy, that otherwise would have been crushed to death. But doing so the driver totally lost control of the vehicle and-

CRASH

The sickening sound of metal bending, tire screeching and glasses breaking.

Car v/s light post on the sidewalk.

The thieves were ok. It wasn't actually that much. They were quite mad though.

"YOU FREAKING STUPID BOY! WANNA KILL YOURSELF?"

Not just yet.

The boy tilted his head, hands on his pockets, silently approaching the car. One of the thieves was cursing and yelling at him.

"Why were you standing in the middle like a retard! Next time we will run over you!" the man was shouting as other one was saying like –hey cool off it's just a stupid child.

The driver put reverse and Killua wondered how much longer he was going to let them hang to their illusion of success. Even the thieves thought aloud that the boy was probably just a morbid passerby for watching-with those sly cat eyes. As the bended metals still allowed the engine to work.

They finally managed to drive out of the post. And then they wasted no time in trying to leave, a bit shaken but finally cheering because the car was not that wrecked and worked enough. Killua sighed. And easily he jumped to the ceiling of the moving car.

He then punched a hole on the roof reaching for the handbrake. Pain- his wrist, he'd totally forgotten. Another screech of wheels and the car stopped as Killua was already inside the car.

"Hello! Didn't expect this turn of events, did you ladies?"

The four men, hororized, recognized the kid and understood something was very wrong. But their attempts to run were fruitless as the trained kid swiftly each neck to paralyze them. "By the way, those chocolates... did I mention they are mine?"

They looked at him now mortified and unable to speak. Killua looked with no sympathy at them. He hated that kind of people "Well, you see, I tend to get quite territorial with my sweeties. So, Lesson of the day: you messed up with the wrong guy"

And he did not contain.

He felt angry these days and so it was easier to feel the bloodlust though he dared not to put it in words. He couldn't refrain from taking delight on making a leg bone break and some ribs snap sickly, realizing he got a bit drunk with the sight of those feeling-superior bastards at his hands- his fists had broken jaws and sent teeth flying with blood and yes...only when he definitely had done them all nosebleed, he finally decided he'd had his toll of fun and proceeded to do some well done hits in the back of their necks.
And all the thieves were sleeping.

"Four positively ugly sleeping beauties" he murmured lifting his eyebrows.

Only then did he look at the load of stolen stuff. There was lots of money. More than what he and Gon had at all. And all the chocolates he'd ordered, along with more. And definitely So Much Money...

Killua sat with ease at the driver's seat. And started the engine.

He arrived at the chocolate shop driving the same green car to find policemen were already there. Along with the two old ladies and Gon staring wildly at everywhere, probably searching for him. Killua could tell Gon was mustering all his will to refrain himself from tracking the albino. As Gon cached Killua's image behind the steering wheel, Killua dedicated the tanned boy a totally cool I'm-James-dean-behind-a-car-tilted grin. Was that relief on Gon's eyes?

He parked, smirking. And then, he downloaded each thief in front of the policemen eyes.

"Heh Gon! I got us a car for our order."

Gon high fived him amused.

"That's them!" one of the old ladies screeched pointing to the robbers. "How did you...?"

"A trained hunter my lady" he bowed. The other option was to say ex assassin, but the presentation tag did not sound as appealing.

"You stopped them?" The youngest of the police officers asked befuddled.

"They had their money and my chocolate" he pointed as if stating the obvious "Here it is" he handed the old ladies a huge bag full of checks and cash.

"But...but..."

"Oh my god, thank you so much!"

"The rest, the safe deposit box and the chocolates are on the car"

As they helped him distribute all this, the same young policeman eyed him nervously, with recognition on his eyes. He suddenly asked "your hair! You...err... are you member of the infamous...err...?"

"Yeah"

The policeman was amazed. A true Zoldick no?

Killua exhaled wearily.

"Why didn't you run with your chocolate and their money?" the policeman blurted, while his team directed the guy uncomfortable looks. The brunette old lady asked in disbelief "Well, there's a lot of money and checks in here. You probably didn't know how much capital its worth..."

"350 billion pounds"

"How?"
"I counted just to check you weren't missing anything."

"...but why?"

"It's yours" he shrugged simply.

"Then I declare case solved" said one chief policeman as the others took the thieves into the police car. "Let's leave. Congratz you kid... err.. Mr. Hunter. Today you truly have lived up to the spirit of your profession"... The other policemen stared at that peculiar white haired boy, with a slightly slouched body and hands on his pockets. Killua smiled a little.

They finally drove away. The gathering however didn't dissolve, each passerby looking at the boy in front of them like an alien.

"Then I guess we leave to continue wondering the city, Gon" Killua said just slightly annoyed at the attention. He hated when people stared at him. It triggered his paranoia.

"Wait!" Berta took Killua by the shoulder "Arigato!" and then both old ladies bowed gratefully to the albino numerous times still in front of the gathering.

"Don't-don't do that- it's embarrassing" Killua realized he was abashed. And that Gon was laughing heartily at the blush in his cheeks. Damn him.

The tanned boy added then a sunny "Thank you for your chocolate misses!"

"Yes, it was a pleasure to be your costumer old hags" he patted Berta on her back (still- don't call me old hag!).

"Ok Freecs, get in the car. We can continue our tour like this on wheel. Bet yah hadn't seen me drive before!" cat grin

"No I hadn't! You have to teach me. You've got a license don't you'?

"No. Why?"

"Oh. Ok!"

"Wait!" the sweet looking lady, called Leti, exclaimed "don't leave just yet" And then she did the weirdest thing: she eyed Killua from top to bottom. And then she whispered into one of Berta's ears.

The brunette spoke in return "you think so Leti?" Leti nodded.

"Well, they are kids, it won't do them any harm, and it's a good thank you gift. You don't do it often. I guess it'll be fine"

"Are you going to give us special chocolate?" Killua said excited

Berta laughed "no... You left almost nothing on stock! We want to give you something more precious. You two, come inside the shop."

The two boys, curious, looked at each other. Then they shrugged and followed the two old ladies inside the shop. After a long hallway, a turn led to a very special door painted with lots of tiny stars. Killua slightly uncomfortable asked "you're not giving us anything illegal are you?"

The two ladies giggled merrily "No! How could you think so?"
At the other side of the exotic door, the kids found a low-ceiling dark room whose walls were draped in rich dark blue silk. One of the ladies lit some candles.

"What is this?" Gon asked curious, looking at the dim lighted purple room. There was a round table with designs in silver carved in the wood at the center.

"You both take a seat" Leti smiled, proceeding to serve both a cup of tea. The mugs where equally blue with silver ornaments. How aesthetic the albino thought. Somehow the room made you feel cozy. Or maybe it was the presence of the old ladies. Cute.

"You said your name was Killua? Well Killua, would you and your friend like to receive a special reading as a thank you gift?" Berta smiled now finally letting gentleness slip into her guarded eyes. At the mystified expression of both boys, she explained

"Leti here, with the aid of a special gift can read your aura entirely. With this she accesses to all of that you are, your past and present, in a second. I on my behalf have the gift of answering with the truth about any question you want, be it past, present or future."

"Oh it's a Nen gift!" Gon exclaimed proudly

"You know about Nen!" Both ladies exclaimed.

"Hai!" Both kids grinned and sipped tea.

"Oh, right, you're hunters! Well then, we can explain this better." Leti sat, and her white hair gleamed with the candles as she sipped her own tea. Meanwhile Killua started putting into his cup inordinate amounts of sugar lumps...

"I have the Nen ability to sense when people need advice, and the Nen ability to read people's aura connecting my Nen to their Nen concentration. However, the way I see it is... different from your classic Nen gazing, gyo. I can see your aura in its entire dimension like a map that displays to me: its texture, its layers reveal me images."

"I can fragment and dissect it, accessing to your most buried past and more faraway memories, to have a glimpse of your hidden essence through this connection. I can unveil your true powers, your true strengths and weaknesses as well as your potential." Leti explained. "And can recover stuff from your past that you don't remember"

Gon was impressed his eyes widening. Suddenly Killua knew what the dark haired boy was going to ask to this lady...

Then Berta spoke

"I, on my behalf, can see clearly every truth, just by being given a question. With the answers comes a vision of the constant moving shapes of life's imbricate weave. I see decisions like red strings attached to each person the decision affects" Berta explained, as she braided her hair. At the light you could see her skillful fingers knotting and crossing the dark strands flecked with silver.

"There are some restrictions though" Berta continued "Nen conditions that allow us to exploit our specialization gift. The one condition for Leti is not to speak at all about what she sees with anyone else than the person in question and me. The things she unveils can only become apparent to her and the one she' seeing. She is bound not to speak about it to anyone. She is also forbidden to lie, even at her own life risk. On the other hand, my condition is to answer the question of the one Leti is seeing. Only when she has formed the attachment can I answer at all. I'm forbidden of avoiding the answer or lying, even under torture." Berta said grimly, tying a leather string on her braid, her brown eyes
dark pools looking at the centerpiece candle.

Both kids were awed. After a second of silence, Gon couldn't contain himself

"You are really awesome! It must take years to train a specialization like that one! "His voice was enthusiastic with appraisal and the ladies could tell that there was not an ounce of envy on his eyes, just pure honest admiration.

Killua as usual was unreadable.

"Do you trust us?" Leti asked her eyes now covered in humbleness "to give you this thank you gift?"

"Yes!" Gon chirped. Killua nodded a bit against his will. He actually was not liking the idea of a reading…

"Ok, then!" Leti said happily "who starts?"

"Gon you go" Killua nudged the smaller boy.

"Oh, really? I was going t jankenpon you on that one, but as you wish" he smiled at his friend.

"What are you going to ask them? You have to think about it before jumping in" Killua noted.

Gon nodded agreeing. He hesitated a demi sec to immediately smile confidently as he stared at the candle in front.

"I already know what"

"What is it?" Killua asked curious

"HI-MIT-SU!"Gon faced him with a smug grin.

Berta meanwhile took Killua outside, to wait for the private reading, as Gon sat there preparing a bit flushed. Berta instructed the Zoldick to wait outside.

And Killua was left alone on the hallways of the back of the shop...Bo-ring

He wondered idly what Gon was going to receive as a reading... Where those two old hags going to realize the rareness of that precious boy they were now examining? Mmm... Yeah. They probably would. They probably already had. Gon was indeed one of kind, a uniqueness that was projected so strongly to anyone he met... That was the reason why Kurapica had blindly followed Gon that day before the first hunter's exam. Kurapica had afterwards told Killua their adventures.

"You know, back then, when he was even younger, you still could tell only by looking at him: He would get where he wanted to go. His will was that strong. And so he was the safest ticket to get me to the hunter's exam place"

Gon did that to you- Killua thought warmly...

He couldn't help it...

Staring at the roof he let himself wonder at years back, beholding in front of his eyes the amazing memories.

He rescued one image: both of them camping at night, with all the huge stars from Whale Island.
Back then he'd envied Gon because he had a goal while he only wanted to run away from things. And Gon had asked him to help him find his father until he found what he wanted.

In the span of a year and a half, the means had become the end. He did want something finally- and with it a shadow was finally weighing on his chest ... It was to be expected, it was his rational mind chastising him because he'd acknowledged long ago that he'd been tamed. But whether it was right to allow himself that, he could not decide. But that pushed him forward in life... and he couldn't help it. He only feared it meant a risk to him...what with recent visitors and horrible...deals...it actually did mean a risk no?

Ten minutes later Gon came out.

He was smiling, followed by Leti.

Correction. Smiling was too soft a term. The spiky haired boy radiated happiness almost contagiously.

"How did it go?" Killua asked genuinely curious.

"Hi-mi-tsu!" singed Gon smiling widely. But the boy was glowing brighter than a candle. The albino could only guess that reading had Gone well at least. He grinned at the sight.

"Now Killua, please come in"

Killua didn't move. He sighed.

"Thank you very much" he said gently "but I rather turn down the offer. You already did this favor to my friend and that's a lot. We're now leaving"

"What... really?" Gon asked startled

"I'm just not interested" Killua smiled at his friend. But Leti took one of Killua's shoulders softly. She was frowning concerned.

"You can't turn it down my boy. You need the advice. I can tell. I see it in you" She said with kind serious eyes examining his own. "That is why I thought the offer in the first place" Killua protested, but she smiled gently as she guided him against his will inside. As Berta closed the door leaving a bewildered Gon behind. Killua tried again as kindly as he could think off, to free himself:

"Please old hags, I don't want a reading"

"But you're desperate for an answer!" Leti tried again "I just don't know which one. Why do you refuse?"

_Because you're going to get horrified after you know who you are talking to._

"Come on seat here"

Yes. He was nervous. Leti was probably going to scream and shoo him outside scandalized in some five minutes. She looked so kind he kind of felt pity for her...

And if she didn't regret having a boy of that nature in his shop, Berta would probably foretell something about the miserable business he was now on- The flash of his encounter with his brother lashed him. He felt the known shame like poison through his veins; the anger-It was none of their business anyway...
But he did want advice.

Well at least he was not going to see them again sparing him further humiliation… and Gon was not going to be in the session. And no, other type of stuff couldn't come up, could they? What kind of stuff did come up in these readings?

If one word, just one humiliating word arose he was leaving. Leaving and killing the ladies' cat outside.

Well no, but he was leaving if he felt like it, ok? And maybe he would kill the cat if anything did set him off. He thought determined to stand this-and again he hated himself because he freaking needed the advice. Desperately.

He felt the self-loathing in waves as he sat. He felt like sending the entire world and its kind people to fuck off in a distant planet. And he felt like sending the rest of the world-the cruel morbid garbage people- to rot into the sun's hellish center.

He felt like exiling himself afterwards to float into outer space… to nothingness… Or getting a lobotomy to shut the fuck up of his now panicking mind, because all these thoughts crossed him in some two seconds.

He closed his eyes tired.

"Good luck Killua!" Gon, curious, had opened the door in a dash before shutting it again at Berta's admonition. Killua, snapping out of his misery, involuntarily smiled. He then sighed, resigned.

Leti eyed him kindly "Ok, let's begin"

"You're not going to like it"

Chapter End Notes

A/N: Hey there! Hope you liked it. Ah, guys I'm so tired! I think I seriously need to sleep after this update.

I send you all a psychological hug and many chocolate cookies
Hello! Thank you all for your reviews and favorites :) I encourage you all to tell me which parts you're liking best, and the ones you are not, it's quite useful.

Warning: adult language.

Disclaimer: I don't own HXH characters :)

"Sooo are you going to tell me?"

"Mmm"

They were returning from Pandora on a very loaded boat. It was ¾ of chocolate and ¼ children….. It was actually slightly tilted because of the weight; both kids were at the furthest corner, trying still to maneuver it.

"Come on! Tell me! What did the 'old hags' told you?" Gon said for the sixth time.

"Now he calls them old hags" Killua said, rowing and sweating as he sank again his oar into the sea. He was definitely the one doing the most effort. Gon had trouble with speaking and rowing at the same time so he just settled to doing one of both.

"I don't know what 'old hag' means. But it uses the word 'old' so I guess it must be somewhat offensive. But it's fun to say, as you would know" Gon chirped and tried it again

"Oooooold… haaaag… old hag! Oooooold...haaag... oldag! oldag! oldaggggggg!" he sang happily.

Killua kept his comments to himself.

Gon looked at him. He'd been more quiet and serious after the reading than ever and Gon didn't like it. He didn't even smack him for acting stupid. He wasn't even celebrating on the tons of chocolates he was carrying back.

"Come ooooon! Tell me! please" Gon resorted to his puppy face.

Killua looked up sighing.

Yep. It always worked.

Killua sank his oar into the sea again. "hi-mit-su."

Oh. Epic fail
"Killuuu~aaaa~! Come on, tell me! What did the old hags told you?"

"you're supposed not to tell anyone no?" he said sinking his oar with effort.

"says who!"

"yours was excellent, I could tell." And Gon nodded emphatically. Killua had diverted the attention, but was actually curious.

Yes. It had been a-ma-zing, the spiky haired boy thought. He hid a smile, as he tried again to concentrate on rowing.

The truth was that he was way too happy. He was trying his best not to bounce out of joy. That made him realize he was probably going to be insufferable today with Killua. But he couldn't help it. His emotions always stirred in the surface of his skin. And he was happy.

He realized that right now he wished he was back at Whale Island… He had so much to ask Aunt Mito about.

If he ever dared ask her, of course. He had a feeling she wouldn't look at him like a monster.

Gon looked at his friend and sighed. It was one of those rare occasions when they were not in tune. Killua was closed up… and sad. Gon could tell. If he could share a piece of the lightness he was feeling. The albino was fixated on pushing and pulling the oar, battling almost with the water, sweating, and bangs of hair falling over his eyes. Gon knew that his mind was positively elsewhere.

But suddenly the albino stopped. Not refraining anymore he opened one of the chocolate boxes and popped a bonbon in his mouth. Relief painted his features. You could tell those damns boxes had him nervous for the entire evening rowing-back. Gon suddenly realized he wasn't rowing and concentrated in doing so.

Meanwhile, Killua tasted the heaven in his mouth.

Mmm...

A bonbon of chocolate and Cheesecake fudge :3.

He felt slightly better. And tossed one at Gon. With certain regret of course. But anyways, the reason they were rowing this hard was because there was such a load of chocolates.

Hours and hours were taken of this day, and night was coming fast.
And he'd failed. He sank the oar and he sank with it into the dark depth...

He could command his restricted motions and empty smiles, but he couldn't rein his thoughts. The lack of solution was itching slowly into exasperation, threatening his firm control over everything. Suddenly he noticed Gon had been meaning to sneak away another bonbon. Being around him always...soothed him. He exhaled slowly.

"So anyways, what did they predict about you?" He poked Gon "you came out so..."

"So what?" the tanned boy lifted his head, licking his chocolate smudged fingers.

Killua observed him. His raven hair, his tanned skin and round handsome cheekbones, those fiery determined eyes. He tilted his grin.

"Well, you were radiant. As if they'd told you Gin Freecs was at the corner or something"
Gon laughed.

"It was more as if I had just eaten an ice cream, or had an orgasm, but yeah" Gon shrugged.

Killua swallowed his bonbon entirely. And choked badly.

"Are you alright?"

"…!" Killua was still coughing. He looked up at Gon annoyed, but then refused direct eye-contact.

"what?" Gon really was dumbfounded

"you" He said sinking his oar into the sea.

"what did I do?"

"…you made me swallow my bonbon. I hate you..."

"Oh, you did not get me! I was using metaphors. I was being descriptive as you were" Gon explained. "You said I had come out of the reading as if I had seen Gin. But I don't know how that feels, Killua. So I said it was more like having just eaten an ice cream or having an orgasm" Gon smiled.

Killua's face drained from color, chalk white. He'd dropped the oar.

In delay he noticed and blushed fiercely at his empty hands. In a quick move he retrieved it.

"Are you ok?"

"...And he calls that being descriptive!" he said annoyed.

"why are you blushing?" Gon asked amused.

Killua wanted now positively to jump from the boat "I'm not" He said angry.

"Right" amused grin

"I'm not!" Killua's blush was now severe.

Awkward silence. Killua looked for safety to his hands, it was usually him mocking Gon, not the other way round, not to add his thoughts were now all incoherent. He tried to speak but ended up mouthing like a fish out of water. Or felt like one.

"So...did... did you..."

"what? Eat an ice cream or had an orgasm?" Gon chirped "Of course not! How could I at the reading with the old ladies? I was comparing only how I felt, I was really happy. Anyways you would have known if I had! I would have shared the ice cream anyways if I had one, so don't be angry. But I didn't walk out with an ice cream or a tent did I?" he said simply and shrugged.

Killua was about to have a brain aneurism. Gon wasn't supposed to talk about this stuff! Wasn't he supposed to be the innocent one here? And yet that's how it seemed, his eyes still giant and innocent.

"what do you know about sex?" the albino blurted out before he could contain himself. His blush was now the color of the deep shade of lipstick Mitosan used to wear at the towns parties. The hue was called 'beyond red'. It did not improve with Gon's smirk. *He was amused. Agh!*
"I know what I've seen in nature and what I observed in animals and people on Whale Island I guess."

*People on Whale Island? but then-ten?*

Gon continued thinking hard about his knowledge on the subject. "Well, from what I've seen, I've noticed animals act different when they want to mate, and people are all happy after they do it. So an orgasm = cool." Gon shrugged again at the gaping Killua.

"..."

"And I felt extremely cool and happy after their reading I must admit" Gon said brightly as he rowed again. He looked at his friend who pretended to be completely interested on his oar.

"Uh"

Gon cheeks were tinged light pink as he proceeded quite enthusiastic

"Sex is really interesting actually. When two beings lust each other, there is certain anticipation in their moves. It's like a hidden spring under their weight, and you see a primal craving in their eyes, as if they were hungry. Their stance change, their voice strains even, I've seen it many times. But when people like each other it's a bit different though, it's like more in their eyes-mmph!"

Tons of chocolate were shoved inside his mouth.

Killua couldn't possibly be more flushed, feeling completely awkward as he kept his hand over Gon's mouth to force him to swallow the chocolate.

"Waaaaa mmmph!" Gon couldn't speak properly now.

Uff... peaceful silence.

Killua let go.

He needed time to regain to normality. What with all these talking! Only Gon with his keen senses and naivety could bring up stuff like that. Scaary. Positively worse than watching Freddy Krueger when he was three.

Gon swallowed

"Mm they're nice! Thanks Killua! Though it seems you are really bashful about sex-

"so what was it that the hags predicted uh? If you were that happy? Winning money, finding your father? Er..."

Gon laughed at the change of subject.

And Killua wanted to shoot himself dead. He felt miserable...

But Gon pressed no further.

"Nope. None of those" Gon was silent a second, licking his fingers as he momentarily stopped rowing again.

Suddenly he looked so cute…
One of his fingers on his mouth.
And Killua closed his eyes. He ached for Gon's simplicity. He wished he could see the subject as simple, easy and as nice as Gon had made it sound. He wished he had a normal knowledge of the subject...

"Here"

Killua opened his eyes to see Gon's extended hand. Another Cheesecake fudge Chocolate. "For the one you swallowed"

"...thanks"

"Killu..."

And Killua noticed his friend had turned serious. He was troubled.

"what is it?" And he listened intently.

"The ladies…..They didn't know if I was going to meet my father" Gon chose one dark patch of sea to rest his gaze "but…it was not going to happen anytime soon"

There was a brief silence.

"Oh."

That changed plans a little.

Killua examined those sad eyes, like liquid honey. He could tell Gon was doing a serious effort to hide the disappointment. He could tell beyond that how it...hurt him.

"Gon" Killua's voice broke the silence. "I'm really sorry"

"no, it's ok. I guess there are other adventures before that one." He returned Killua's gaze with a confident smile "And I've already said that I'm already happy"

Killua tilted his smile. Unsure...are you?

Gon gave up rowing and lied on his back to look at the starry sky. It was streaked with some thin clouds.

You couldn't tell by looking, but Gon knew it was going to rain.

Killua shrugged and copied him, leaving the oar aside.

"Anyways, we're close to the ship" he murmured.

Gon was now the one quiet. Killua tossed his head to one side to look intently at Gon.

Suddenly Gon felt his hand on his shoulder.

"Gon…the fact they didn't see him near the red strings doesn't mean anything. It certainly doesn't mean that we have to stop looking for him"

Gon remained quiet a few seconds. And sighed.

"I don't want too…but let's face it; it's not going to happen anytime soon. Maybe we shouldn't bother looking for leads…Not for some time at least"
"Bullshit."

"We could do something else. Like something you like for a change... You'd like that no?"

He was really asking. "...I was afraid about what you'd say, all this time...but maybe you have found something you want. And if so you are totally free to lea-"

"Gon, don't be such a bore! Geez!"

The albino looked quite vexed as he turned to face the raven.

"Gon...Look" the albino sighed "the ladies, they told us that what they offered us was just a crosssection in our lives. That is because the red strings attached to us are constantly changing. Unknown events affect decisions ever so slightly or dramatically. They can change completely the final outlook one day to the other ...."

Gon was confused. Yes, they'd said that. And he imagined life was like a sweater being knit by his grandmother's skillful hands...

"Gon, fate is in our hands and we can bend it, dramatically so, if we want to". He knew that from personal experience. Gon interrupted his thoughts.

"You think their Nen specialization is similar to the ability Neon Nostrad had? Her prophecies at the end did turn out wrong because somehow we came in and screwed the landscape"

"Exactly!"

"but it was unlikely for the prophecy to change. Highly unlikely" Gon replied doubtful.

"And the only way to know if there is a sudden turn of events would be to continue looking for that selfish bastard"

"Gin?"

"Yes doh! If so, well then you have two choices: we could return to Pandora every day to those ladies for an update on our state of affairs. Or we could blindly jump to the adventure and see what happens with time. I don't know about you but I'm choosing the one I'll have more fun"

"...me too". Suddenly he realized Gon had been gazing at him intensely.

"Thank you Killu".

Killua nodded and popped another bonbon in his mouth.

But then he noticed Gon's smile was turning into a smirk, his eyes still alight.

"what"

"I wasn't going to stop looking for Gin." And in Gon's eyes shone again that fire: the embodiment of determination. "I just wanted to hear you say all of that." His eyes stared at the skies as he smirked.

Killua looked at him in disbelief and annoyance. And against his will he let out the laughter bubbling in his chest. The prick.

Gon felt relief. So he'd made him laugh.

Killua's pocket vibrated. It was his cell phone alarm, telling them it was nine pm; they were to meet Kurapica and Leorio on the ship to dine together.
"Those two will be worried again" Gon sighed

Suddenly Killua sniggered.

"The way you shooed off Leorio yesterday was just epic!"

"uh?"

"You saying 'but you're not our parents' ha ha!"

"Ooh I was not shooing him off. It's true! We're not kids anymore. We can fend for ourselves"

"Yeah I hate when they kid us, as if they didn't know what we've done..."

"as if they didn't know what we're capable off!"

Gon lifted a fist in the air as if fighting for some hidden cause.

"your damn right!" Killua supported him and raised his own fist.

"we are hunters!"

"We are!"

"we are terribly strong"

"We are!"

"and we have each other!" Gon chanted his fist still in the air.

Gon sometimes did that- went and said the first thing that came into his mind-like orgasms or friendship- and left him out of breath. Killua smiled and raised his fist again "yeah!"

And the albino added

"And I'm allowed to go and throw you into the water whenever I want!"

"yeah! No, wait that no-"

Splash

Again. AGAIN.

Gon was furious "YOU ALWAYS ARE THROWING ME TO THE WATER YOU STUPID MORON!"

But Killua had done so because they'd arrived to the ship and he jumped easily to the deck to escape Gon's attack. He observed the boy, his now angry expression.

He felt certain fondness akin his chest. The tanned boy had made him laugh. That stupid dope that had been his real intention all the while no?

"DON'T YOU HAVE MORE CREATIVE ATTACKS?"

"Hah! I totally caught you off guard!" the albino said giggling, safe from his spot.

"Ok. I won't attack you. Ill attack them" he pointed the chocolate boat
"DON'T YOU DARE! They have nothing to do with this, don't blame them!" Killua had jumped again into the boat and was quickly moving one by one the numerous bags and bundles with chocolate inside.

Gon, careful to check which one was his friend's bruised wrist, took Killua's good wrist and pulled him back.

Splash.

HAH!

But in an instant Killua was behind Gon, crossing one arm around him to deny him escape, the other pinning painfully his arm to his back.

"Now 'GIVE UP!'" he mimicked Hanzo. "Or I'll break your arm!"

"AAAAAAAAH! YOU'RE SO DEAD KILLUA" He turned and pushed the albino to the boat but this one ducked. And somehow situations where reversed as Gon found himself being pushed and imprisoned against the boat by the albino.
He'd grabbed the arm Gon had used to pull him to the water, to bend it over his head. And Gon realized Killua had him pinned against the boat. Killua's wet strands of hair flew from his face, in an expression that made him look indomitable. And he liked it.

Killua was biting his lip, with an intensely smug look.

"Who's the one blushing now" he muttered under his breath.

Gon suddenly realized the heat in his cheeks and bit his own lip. They'd locked eyes. Gon suddenly felt out of breath.

But then the ex-assassin registered from the corner of his eye how one of the boxes precariously balance fell and opened, scattering bonbons to the sea.

"NOOOOOOOOOOOOOOO"

Gon laughed and continued his intents to attack the chocolate as Killua desperately tried to defend his treasure.

Leorio and Kurapica had heard the battle from afar… Leorio meanwhile unloaded all of the… what was it? wait. All of it chocolate? No doubt this one was Killua…

"you'll have to share eh?" he said.

Both kids looked at the doctor.

And in one swift motion they pushed him to the warm warm sea.

It began to rain…

And Kurapica suddenly laughed with such mirth it was lovely to hear.

Four very wet friends were warming themselves against a chimney, in the common room of the ship. Towels in their shoulders, tons of quilts and an enthusiastic conversation. It was raining hard against the roof and decks, and the ship swayed in quite an 'advantaruss' way.

Kurapica was recounting to a foreign girl they'd met how Gon had known all day there was coming
a storm. No one—except Killua and the captain—had believed him. Gon interrupted to explain it'd been the reason the sea had been so warm. According to the boy, the birds had 'told' him.

Leorio beat him saying it was no excuse to ruin his doctor suit with water.

Kurapica sometimes lost the track of the conversation, noting, again and again, how Killua was absorbed staring at the fire, quite silent. He was inside a giant sweater Leorio had lent him. He didn't even grasp the vain attempts of that foreign girl to hit on him.

"Hey, have a cup of chocolate"

Killua stared at the blond emptily some seconds, before understanding and taking the mug in his hands.

But he just left it there in his hands, not even taking a sip. And let's remind ourselves, it was chocolate. Kurapica offered to the rest the hot beverage, while eyeing again the small Zoldick.

Killua sighed. Gon had that peculiar ability to make him loose the track of time…
He was so tired and hadn't even noticed.
It had been a long day. And tonight wasn't going to be a piece of cake.

He closed his eyes, the mug warming his cold hands. He was avoiding the issue but it was now hours away.

In some hours he would zombie walk into the said room; he would turn of the handle and would confront his brother. He would try a Nen attack he'd been rehearsing…

The boy closed his eyes and curled inside his sweater even more…the feeling of loathing him…and there it was always, the reluctance to admit he was scared no, the illusion, the vain illusion it was all going to be fine. He left the mug on a small table nearby to lift his knees to his chest. He felt cold.
But he felt most of all tiredness...
His eyes followed absorbed the silent movements of the fire embers of the he could just sleep through it all…If he could just be left in peace…he was so so tired.

He suddenly found himself leaning against Gon, eyes closing. Gon was chattering happily and didn't mind that the sleepy weight on his shoulders was slipping further and further to his lap… Killua had closed his eyes again… Gon's scent… he began to nod away…

He didn't register when Kurapica took him from Gon's lap and carried him to the sofa near the fire.

The Kuruta covered the sleeping boy with a blanket nearby. The boy was fast asleep. And the blond noted how he finally seemed at peace; the troubled expression he had before, now fading into his real child-like features…

These kids had run the entire day to exhaustion it seemed, eh? Kurapica had lifted his eyebrow amused.

He brushed away some of the silver strands from Killua's forehead… And then, he proceeded to do what he'd been meaning from the start: Gently and very slowly he took Killua's wrist to examine it.

It surprised him to find almost nothing of the big bruising and swelling they'd all seen some days before… mmm he probably was a fast healer…

Out of curiosity he lifted the sleeve a bit more as he'd intended that day, when Leorio lifted him by
his collar and the boy had paled chalk white.

He was left perplexed.

On the inside of his elbow, clearly printed were three purple bruises. Kurapica's eyes darkened. Hands that had grasped the boy hard enough to leave its impression. Kurapica realized that the wrist below had been Nen healed, probably today at Pandora… He now could Nen trace the healing done.

He observed intently the sleeping boy… now realizing details he'd missed before: the shadow under his eyes, the exhaustion of his brow. Anyone could attack a kid and dislocate their wrist and bruise their arm with enough strength. But only few could actually leave a bruise on this particular kid.

Killua, being just a boy, already was far stronger than most Nen users…

It'd been an issue, the kids being that strong.

Actually, with Leorio they'd been discussing just this last item quite recently. These kids were rare and unique, strong. Their potential was breathtaking. But they were still kids. You almost felt responsible for them when they were around- what with the many times they’d risked their lives so stupidly. So they'd arrived to an agreement: in the meantime these boys grew they would look out for them.

As the two would immerse on adventures on their own, they always kept an eye with tags and friends and informers who told them they were ok. When letter of them came scarce, Kurapica once, and Leorio on other occasion had even travelled to search for them. Just to check out they were carrying along…

Their adventures spoke for them. When once they Kuruta and the doctor had stumbled with famous Biscuit, she had said with sparkling eyes: two raw gems.

But they were oh yes, still kids, Biscuit confirmed. They suffered and laughed with that every day. And didn't these two get into problems...

Checking that Leorio and Gon were still immersed in conversation at the fire, Kurapica turned to the silver haired boy sleeping. His hands lingered over the collar of his sweater. And he lowered it a little to look for any more signs of violence. There were none. On his neck… but there weren't any.

Not satisfied he grabbed Killua's shirt by the neck and gently pulled it to a side so that he could see better… the albino's brow creased… he murmured something. But kept sleeping soundly still as Kurapica held his breath.

There was another bruise. Large. It went from Killua's left shoulder to the beginning of his collarbone… With that, he now saw a faint little thumb like bruise in his neck, under his ear quite nonexistent if you weren't looking.

As if he'd been gagged.

And that day he had dislocated that wrist, Kurapica was sure.

Of course it had not been a common rock scuba diving. Maybe Leorio had believed the simple little lie. He knew better.

If Killua had been hurt in first place… It probably meant either he had let the damage happen at free will… or quite contrary it had been against a Nen user that –with a specialization of some sort- had
left Killua defenseless…Either explanation did not account for the reason Killua would hide such an encounter… Except it had been dangerous…?” or embarrassing…? Or maybe he had something to hide… or protect.

The boy did have something that he wanted to protect.

Oh come on, you think too much. Leorio always said that.

Maybe it had been an accident, and Killua just hadn't reacted properly

_Yeah right with their keen senses and Nen._

Maybe it had been fighting with Gon and he was protecting him?

_No… Gon, with his blatant personality would have babbled about it._

mmm…

Kurapica swiftly pulled down the boy's sleeve and examined his sleeping form for some minute, worried and wondering.

It was a curse, that of thinking too much out of too little… he just had to ask Killua of course. He would have to confront him in the morrow.

Gon was suddenly by his side also looking at their sleeping friend.

"My wasn't this one tired" Kurapica commented

"yeah! We had quite a day. He taught me how to drive! isn't he cool? And then a policeman arrested us because we didn't have our licenses but then Killua went and pulled out this trick-"

There was silence where Killua's brow creased and he mumbled something again, to return to peacefulness…

"I better speak softer near him" Gon grinned.

"Gon… I'm glad you're his partner…” Kurapica eyed the tanned boy, smiling. Gon looked at him befuddled. The blond proceeded.

"Before, at the hunter's exam…he seemed a troubled boy. He barely ever smiled. You remember?"

Yes he did. Gon hadn't liked that.

"When he is with you, though, he changes. Around you he seems really happy"

"does he?"

"yep." Kurapica ruffled Gon's hair.

A hand took Gon's shoulder.

"Actually we are all glad to have you Gon as our friend" Leorio was standing right beside him. He bent to look at his face directly. "You're so lively it's contagious" he grinned at the smaller one.

Leorio thought about the conversation he'd held with his youngest friend…and Gon, well… he really did something to your heart. It had to do with his innocence probably… or his… joy of living…
"I'm the one lucky for having friends like you! It's so much fun" he chirped

Leorio ruffled the spiky haired boy as well.

"Still it's no excuse to pull me into the water..." the doctor knocked him.

"ouch!"

Kurapica was smiling at Leorio.

Leorio noticed it, how warm that smile was... Leorio could tell this was one of the few moments Kurapica was himself. Near friendship, near innocence, the blond finally let his defenses down...

Leorio smiled back at Kurapica. Just an instant, their eyes locked in that smile. Kurapica was the first to snap and laugh. Gon had been trying to carry the unconscious boy on his back but Killua was a dead weight.

"I'll take this sleepy lad to his bed" Kurapica offered

He carried him on his back, followed by Gon and Leorio as they fought again about jankenpon laws... It was... warm... that life, where he was surrounded by friends... the blond smiled. He enjoyed so much their company...

He thanked once more to life, the skies and earth, like a prayer... to have given him another chance to enjoy moments like this again...

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Killua woke up in his bed with a start-

He'd fallen asleep?

GON!

He sat alarmed checking for the raven.

Killua took a hand to his chest. There he was, drooling and sprawled across the mattress.

The albino sighed and checked the time. It was 23:43.

He had not missed it.

He chastised himself, what was he thinking? Being so reckless! He'd put Gon in danger! The albino looked at his side once again.

There, the tanned boy rested peacefully, his chest slowly going up... then down....

Killua turned once again in the bed.

His thoughts still would come scattered and wild. Even though he had some time to try to settle his feelings down...

The certainty that he would not be able to out force his brother was settling in his chest slowly and unevenly. In front of his eyes ran all the calculations...all the vain stratagems. And he couldn't avoid it, feeling the dread of what was about to happen.

He knew that before, in the far past, he'd grown... used to it... So why was this time different?
It was a big deal he'd cried at his encounter with Illumi. He never cried. Ever. He had a coping mechanism not to feel pain nor pleasure or emotions in extreme situations. Ok, he did feel them. But it didn't get to him; as if he was dissociated or something, a technique learned as a child. But something had lifted all his defenses as if they were nothing. They'd just crumbled like paper... Gon. It was as if these years with Gon he'd started feeling again. He'd been dead inside before...

Why Illumi had to say 'Gon'...

It had been a long time since the last... He tried not to remember, but involuntary memories surfaced... He closed them violently. He remembered how he'd decided to ran. He did not care. He felt empty. Dangerously so. And that small part of him that was still alive was raw as burnt skin. Again those hunting images assaulted him -the torture chamber, the table he'd used- Killua tossed in the bed again, as he summoned the memory of his run. How he'd dug his nails viciously to wound his mother, the hatred, the adrenaline rush and the freedom when her body hit the floor. The smirk and blood on his cheek when rolling away on his skate leaving Milluki behind. He wasn't meant to be innocent. It had felt so good.

It'd been almost three years since then. They seemed so far. He still did not regret the incident one bit. And yet, he did not know why that night when he escaped he had not attempted against himself. When he'd wanted nothing else that badly. He was empty an unfeeling. All seemed dull and dead. He'd only acted on the one sheer impulse to run away. Out there was nothing, nothing else. There should not have been anything else.

Now it was different.

Gon, a sea tide of feelings and truth. Being near him was like resting outside, in the deck, on his back, underneath the sun. Letting his skin hold the sun gratefully. He had so much to learn about him. And he'd learned already a lot. All this time he'd been gradually allowing himself to... feel. It was weird; with that he'd began to fathom the borders of his self, now that he wasn't someone else's puppet. What he liked, what he didn't like, what he felt. No wonder he'd been so lost at the beginning about what he wanted to do! And yes yes yes he liked chocolate, he was thrilled by electricity and he felt like being with Gon. Drawn to him like a moth to a lamp. Near him he felt he could recover the full extent of his own power- one that hadn't to do with his abilities. That's how they worked together, strengthening each other. Ah... it sounded so stupid he grinned darkly. He did not like to hear he'd been so fuckinly low, tainted and weak. He wouldn't hear about it...

And Gon...

He still felt tainted by darkness. But Gon had this way of making him feel just... normal... Playing all the time, leaving life at ease, laughing, fighting, competing, sharing troubles and solutions, always on the edge of adventure... and just alright.

He was not going to return. Ever...

He knew Illumi was after that like a wolf hunting with leisure its prey. But he just couldn't and he gulped and swore no he couldn't return to be his... it made him sick. To just imagine the possibility of being lifeless, to return after he'd known the polar opposite, the torture, the mind games, the sickness, the nightmares "My puppet"... he turned again. Breathe... try to focus... It was going to be one night... no, probably not. But he'd tell Gon he did not like being close to Illumi and beg him to leave.
the ship. Yes that would work, just to leave wherever they could. They could steal Illumi’s chopper
ha ha...
And back to normal uh? Ok, don’t worry, just some nights to withstand because Gon is in danger,
the chain of islands over and back to normal.
Return to... Gon... and... That real family he had here with his friends...
It's not like he wasn't going to fight- but he had made a deal-and in case things when wrong he did
rationalize- it's just... he breathed hard...
yeah... just sex.

Chapter End Notes

Now I'll just go and summon courage.
Chapter Notes

This chapter has a major **warning**. So again, I repeat myself: **This fan fiction requires adult readers.** I encourage all underage readers to leave. Imagine youtube asking for your account and to register when censoring mature content. Skip this chapter. You are warned. All other readers: you will find sexual content, and abuse. If you do not want to stumble with these items and something terribly crude, do not continue. Please do not flame, you've been warned...What's to come is sad. And it happens. This was horribly difficult to write...

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

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."I must go on standing, you can't break that which isn't yours

...I must go on standing, I'm not my own, it's not my choice...

-Regina Spektor, "Après Moi"

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Time crawls your skin, so sick, so sick with its ghostly fingers, and, almost deaf, you pass the time-you list the rules of poker- very well- oh don't mind the clock ticking, you are numb and deaf- you feel your leg's weight on the bed-very well- then imagine the swinging pendulum slicing you in half-half half- avoid staring at the time for one entire minute and list the rules of black jack this time-count your heart beats, count your breaths, and last another minute staring at the ceiling in the dark.

A final side glance confirmed it. 11:45 pm.

To drowsily sit up. To walk silent, slowly, to the door.
To turn the door's knob.

To turn back one last time. And to take one last glance of the sleeping boy he was leaving behind.

He still had fifteen minutes.

He searched lazily for a song to hum inside his head, as he walked. Never making a sound. What was it that Senritsu called it? *Estinto?*

"Now I understand why Kurapica trusts you. You've got the softest steps I've ever heard. Truly an assassin"

He noticed the silence after the recent hard rain... the lonely halls reaching the deck.
White-washed in the moon's light, arching the cruise's magnificence
In other occasion it would have been peaceful...The given situation lined them like the walkways of a graveyard.

Out there, the sea was a spoonful holding the firmament.

He grinned bitterly.
All was void of sound and meaning. It held no beauty. If somewhat, a little cruelty.
It was inviting

His hands took the known handrail... Where some idle day Gon had spent hours upside down, trying to reach for the water unsuccessfully…

*Kii-llu-aaa*. He would call up, extending the vowels.

The boy had flopped beside Gon, upside down as well. And he'd reached the water with the tip of his fingers easily. Gon had been quite annoyed at this. But it hadn't stopped him from leaving them surfacing the water till they'd gone numb.

The night breeze now played with some strands of his hair. Distracted, he'd peered down the edge.

He'd caught a boy staring from the dark waters. As if from a well.

And that a reflection held no answers.

In the same way that the cold canvas of scenery beheld him in mute silence.

No meaning.

He shook his dark thoughts away. He was wasting he wasn't moving. Where was it? His determination. To remind himself again. And again. As if chanting a mantra. He began walking silently, hands in his pockets, when he found it. And it was somewhat soothing.

Peaceful night for you Freecs.

He yearned for Gon's frame of mind now, being the optimistic one. Or maybe he just wished inside his head a silence resembling the one outside. But he *was* going to fight Illumi. He was. He had to. So he was. That should be a bit satisfying. No? *-Yeah, in the narrow chance that you are actually able to fight back.* He laughed bitterly.

For his mental stability he'd keep the wishful thinking.

Yeah right.

He walked down the stairs. Tap tap tap.

Not thinking any more. Not even feeling dread. He crossed the spot where he'd fallen to the floor. And he felt nothing. Emptiness.

Good. He'd started wondering since when he'd become so weak to pain.

He turned the corner. Where he stared at the dark hall. Three steps and he would be in front of the door. He felt his own Nen flowing- a faint warm layer blanketing him since he left Gon's room. Nothing was impeding him from using it.

He would give a fight.

And he was stalling, outside that door. He had already calculated all the possible different outcomes. He'd rechecked them and double checked.

His watch itched against his skin.

00:00

"*Killua! What are you thinking?!*"
Gon stood up, his fist clenched. They were in front of Nobunaga, trapped in a room at the spiders den. Only some candles lit the chamber.

Killua sighed heavily...It was a matter of time.

And he took another step forward. That was why it made sense. 'You can't' Illumi had said-but he could-he could-he would

"Shut up!" - Killua yelled as if to himself but in answer to Nobunaga's laughter. "If we don't try, we'll never know!"

That stopped Nobunaga's good humour short.

"Maybe it'll cost my life but I'll manage to stop his sword, Gon. You'll use that moment to escape"

He felt the determination blanket his will into a void. There was silence as he took a step forward. He was ready to kill and die.

WHAM

Gon had punched him.

"ARE YOU CRAZY!" Killua had turned swiftly to grab the collar of his green shirt enraged

"YOU'RE THE ONE CRAZY!" Gon yelled grabbing Killua's shirt, and Killua was about to punch him.

"LET GO OFF ME YOU IDIOT-"

" YOU IDIOT! YOU'RE THE ONE THAT TOLD ME NOT TO TALK SO EASILY OF DYING!" Gon yelled crossly, shaking his head furious.

"Wait, what?"

"IT'S ALL THE SAME TO ME IF I DIE BUT NOT YOU! You're forbidden to die!" The raven boy glared in rage.

"WHAT? THAT'S STUPID"

"THEN I AM STUPID" Gon stomped the ground

Nobunaga exploded in laughter.

"Ah! You're funny!"

They weren't.

...

At the end they had been able to escape. Safe and sound, both of them, running together. They'd managed to return to Leorio. And that was the first time Killua tasted cheap beer...

00:00

Killua opened the door...The lights were off. He could make out a bed, a table, curtains.
"Brother" He registered without surprise the hand grasping his shoulder from behind.

"Killua" he whispered in answer "so... obedient. Not far from a trained dog" Long dark hair sliding to his shoulder. "Not far from a puppet"

Killua turned swift as a snake summoning electricity to his palm. Illumi managed to grasp his forearm barely.

He realized with exasperation that in that small interaction he'd somehow been forced into zetsu. Illumi's iron fingers clasped his arm over his head. Detached he felt the pain as he wondered when it had happened. He ran calculations in demisecs- Time was precious- he had to verify if attacks from afar would work. But he wasn't able to move.

A sense of claustrophobia, of loosing control, complete control, hit him.

Illumi observed him from his height. And under his eyes, he was a nothing. The power he'd learned with Gon, it had vanished.

Killua closed his eyes. And he relaxed, falling limply to the front, against the elder's chest.

He waited. Without moving. Breathing against the elder's chest.

Illumi amused lifted Killua's chin as his grasp loosened.

His dark bottomless eyes- and Killua jumped backwards releasing his arm. Hah, he'd fallen. No-oh he wouldn't give up- No submission today- he wouldn't be doe-eyed and sad, he would rely on speed

He was at the moment, skipping and disappearing to attack. He tried to summon electricity-all in half a millisecond -

Dizziness struck him hard. He stumbled, all his limbs weighed a ton. So at distance he was still cast in zetsu. He cursed under his breath feeling adrenaline at the lack of control- he didn't understand how-complete zetsu...

No, it was more than that. It was as if Illumi was draining all of his energy, while remaining chillingly still at the corner of the door.

Alarms were ringing inside his head as he realized he'd fallen to his knees without meaning too. Something heavy and invisible was crushing him to the floor. He didn't miss the elder's expression. His fists were clenching trying to move. There was a lump at his throat that he would not swallow.

The elder had approached him slowly. He gently lifted the boy as if a marionette.

Snake- Killua recoiled swiftly to sink his clawed hand. He was fast enough to draw blood -before being detained swiftly by the wrist. Oh but Killua was expecting that, and in a twist to his own arm the pocket knife he carried flashed silver into the elder's chest, to spin, to cut. He was violently turned into immobility.

Illumi stared at him, his fingers an iron grip around the wrist that held the weapon a millimetre away from his own body. Slowly twisting. Inflicting pain but the boy still didn't let go of the pocket knife. He fought with all his might , trying to sink that blade, useless as it may have seen...But of course Illumi won the strength battle as he finally was able to toss the pocket knife away. His eyes posed again on the younger boy. And Killua couldn't help but agree. It had felt pathetic.

"...Hadda try" He tilted an empty expression.

Killua felt the draining of energy loosening its coil around his body. And then eerily, Illumi caressed the loose silver strands that framed his face.

"To kill me?"
With empty eyes Killua assented.

And as the man dropped his hand to the boy's shoulder to toss him to the floor, softly, Killua acknowledged, with a sinking familiar feeling, that nothing had escaped his own predictions.

He hit the ground. He avoided those dark pits of eyes that beheld him. And he felt dead, just dead. He wasn't even aiming for a scream or anything. He focused on the ceiling when Illumi began to unbutton his shirt. "I missed you Killua" A whisper, a voice more akin to control than to emotion. "I've been condescending. I've let you wonder out into the world for quite some time" A murmur against his neck and the anger leaping up his chest- *Oh and there he was thinking his freedom was his own achievement*. He shut his eyes tight, remember those are black words-remember those are-Mmmnngh!. A mouth kissing lips-unresponding lips. And the ceiling. That hand trailing down there, the unzipping of pants.

He held his breath.

But then it abruptly stopped. Just like that. The elder stood up. Killua laid on the ground.

As seconds passed and nothing came, not a punch, not anything, Killua finally stared at his elder brother.

Illumi high eyes were...dissatisfied. His had the stance of someone appreciating a work of art. And being utterly displeased.

No, it was darker than that.

Disgust.

He was disgusted. Somehow it was an expression, an infinitesimal expression, maybe imagined and somehow burning, that regrettably stuck to his mind. Those dark eyes in disgust. He stared at him in fascination and revulsion, almost as if speaking- as if they'd been here before, Oh tell me kills when was it that all just turned to paperwork?

Killua was lifted effortlessly by his PJ's and tossed to the bed. He felt the nails against in his waist, the weight pressing him down.

"You are smart Killua. That I can concede you" The haunting monotone slipping past his skin-defining him.

"You are aware a snap of my fingers back at home would have got me better services." He murmured faintly "Undoubtedly sparing me off this hunt" toneless words, his grasp tightening the ring of pain around his arm. And then impossibly so his eyes darkened.

"Tell me Killua, why am I here" His hand softly arched Killua's neck. "Tell me, answer with precision and I let you go unscathed" Illumi observed with fascination. The violet widening eyes. The widening pupils. The horror. Killua immediately turned his head to a side.

"You want sex"

He shrugged it in a whisper.

"Wrong"

Killua looked up confused. Illumi was still observing him, a dark well of a gaze that did not waver
"Sex is not the reason I returned. Even sex dolls seem to act it better than you"

"Sorry. It's all I've got in stock". Killua spoke empty.

He felt the sting on his cheek reach his skull to the side. He'd been slapped with moderate force. It wasn't what he said. It was that he'd answered.

When he looked up, he met with defiance Illumi's patient expression…Severity and observation, morbid observation, the same one he bore when training. His weight made it more difficult to breathe. Two fingers raised his chin gently.

"Kils" He spoke impassive "Little brother...I know you completely, I know you so... You know I can make you feel pain. I can blind you. I can leave you deaf. I can leave you impaired for life. I can kill you. You from all know I have that power. The power to cause you pain" His stare was hollow and intense, his weight pressing him against the mattress. "You should bear in mind that every second I don't do so, I'm exercising my free will" His voice lowered as a knee pressed to his chest. And suddenly Killua felt that anger almost visibly coiling around his body, engulfing him.

"Then do so" He almost spat. Illumi observed him silent. Killua bit his lip, raising his head from bed, defiant. "Kill me then Illumi. Bury me in a shallow grave. Kill me..." There was a silence... and in that silence a petition...

Something in the pitch black eyes softened. Killua looked away.

"Killua" Illumi whispered his name against his skin. "You've got things in the wrong order" He faintly murmured, as he placed his weight over the boy.

"Come back" Illumi observed him, empty. Killua felt a pang to his chest, his heart suddenly racing, but he closed his eyes shut again. Illumi's tilted his head and Killua was struck again. A flare of pain,-his ribs- he was left breathless. And Illumi was observing keenly his reaction, as if drinking from it, as if testing him. And he felt so...dead. So...dead. A slap, a punch they were nothing. In the old days Illumi would do that- wouldn't he- Let's go poking needles up and down the dummy dolls, let's melt them, let's try where it hurts, let's cut flesh to see what happens- let's see what lies underneath chaffed skin-the morbid curiosity- And him there lying there, always lying there, waiting for it to finish... and the other part to start.

...Illumi's aura enveloped him sickly….a surpassing possessiveness against his skin.

He felt pain waving. He endured. He always endured.

A murmur against his neck.

"I'm here because you were starting to believe your lie, little Killua..."

Other less trained would have shivered at that name. He felt the uneasiness creeping up his chest as he tried to refrain from showing anything-he would not feed him -blank stare-

"It is fascinating...how flawlessly you are able to do it" Illumi loosened the grasp of his arm to unbutton slowly the rest of his shirt.

"An uncanny ability to feed your lies to extremes, for sustained periods of time..." A-an-and it sounded so veritable he could buy it "To believe the lie of a life you're carrying... yet again" HATE-HATE-those words, each one of them aimed at owning him-

But then words were always distractions. Killua immediately detected the one second opening. He
yanked his arms fast away, seeing his narrow chance immediately, gaining momentum with his legs.

Run.

He was caught and turned down violently - then punched on his back, Illumi now holding him still with his knee. He breathed adrenaline against the mattress - too much information to process in one second. First; openings existed, rare, almost non-existent, but he could try, there may be an escape - hope; Second - he'd been tested, he was being tested and he'd just failed - he felt his pajama top being torn in two tries, the sick sound of cloth tearing - Three - He'd spurred the ire - he'd gone and thrown himself as wood to the fire and Illumi's voice now reach him very very low.

"You were such a fast learner... such a promise" A faint murmur, almost inaudible. Sharp pain travelled through his spine - a hit. He felt claws bury down the skin of his back and his breath hitched. Illumi lifted his head by his hair. Remember, it's just pain.

"Beg" Now beg your way out

Killua shook his head, mute. No.

Killua's head was pushed into the mattress. He could not breathe - and he was kept there. Seconds later he was yanked again from his head.

"Beg Killua"

"No"

Once, not long ago, he could follow orders without question...To feign, comply, submit, tainted as ever, dirty - he'd always been. The painful fact was burnt into his brain forever-drilled - but now he couldn't do what Illumi wanted; he had...he had something he cared for under lock and he'd tossed the key - He was not dead as he'd been before - he couldn't submit - he couldn't now - Breathe - Suddenly with the corner of his eye he saw Illumi retrieving the pocket knife and before he knew it he felt blinding pain on his back. Ugh - he heard himself grunting, then shutting his lips tight. .

Illumi was drawing a single straight line down his spine and he was breathing fast not to feel the pain - the pain, it rose and fell. It was just another torture session, it was just pain - The man could tell though the boy's expression was dissociated - Could he tell he was far gone? - but then he felt the tip of that blade again, now at the small of his back and shivering pain, And the boy realized he was being written something.

"Feeling creative..." the boy muttered under his breath, not able to hide the thickness of his voice.

Writing. Illumi's attention was diverted. And Killua swiftly moved his right hand - a ready claw - PAIN.

Dislocated wrist. Illumi just caught it and twisted.

Killua closed his eyes, biting his lip. No, that pain would not reach his dead eyes, he wouldn't allow it - but Bastard he wasn't a fucking farm animal to be branded - He wasn't - He wasn't - What was he anyway? He couldn't fight -

The boy used his own knee against the mattress to flip over. But as he did so, in a wrong move, the blade on Illumi's hand sank deep on his hip.

He felt it hit the bone.
Illumi was startled...but left it there, observing.

In delay he felt blinding pain, like a needle direct to a nerve up his spine. He gasped. And then the immediate red wetness slipping down his waist. He felt faint.

Switch.
Dead again.

Automatically, all endurance and self-control summoned to hold to the numbness. He felt the dizziness reach his head in a rush… Blood on his back, blood on the sheets, it pulsed up his spine, the pain. And he… He actually grinned feeling the irony...The pain it… it just augmented that desire that was eating him from inside... to die. Nonexistence-yes, nonexistence being a void so much better than the one in those eyes.

Please let it stop soon. Blood spurting out the gash at his side and you could read in Illumi's eyes surprise. Then Lust. The strong aura rising, smothering as his hands were pinned.

"You are the one that bring this onto yourself brother. It's as if you still, still don't understand". He was pressing himself down the smaller body, cherishing the control.

"You do this as if you were making me a favor." Illumi seemed to chant faintly "You oppose defiance as if something was in your control. When in truth, you have none- When in truth I'm just putting things on the right place" He hummed against his skin "It's for your own good..." His hand covered the wound at his waist, as if to stop the bleeding. The boy remained expressionless, slightly trembling at the strain it took to endure against those void eyes...as if they were two seams where all light was consumed to non-existence. He fought back the childhood terror. As Illumi shortened the distance to his navel, looking intently at the boy's reaction.

"You're doing me no favor. I've had better than you. And now... I'm actually dying to do this to an actual virgin. The son of a true hunter...Someone innocent...that could be enticing..."

His heart stopped.
He's just taunting. He is.

Illumi's lips traced a path down his chest ...

And he let him...

"You missed this"

He didn't

"Yet I could bet" Illumi whispered "You would want to do it yourself on him first uh? "

Killua kicked violently Not Gon, not here but that voice continued to drip black words "Don't you want to mark him as your property? Ah... well...the problem is that I'm doing now the exact thing here..."

He was opening his legs

"Things you won't be able to undo"

A lack of air in his lungs as those words piled like stones over his rising and falling chest, making it hard to breathe. His brain was getting tired of dismantling truth from not- dismantling truth from not, real from not real, not feel pain- or-...not to feel-
"I'll be priceless when I try him for the first-"

"I'll kill you"

Killua didn't recognize his scraped voice. Illumi observed him silent and for a second the boy thought he would be struck again because of his defiance. But Illumi was collected, if slightly amused

"...Why haven't you already Killua?..."

Silence

"I'll have a wild guess here." Killua heard the unzipping of pants. Then bitterness up his throat. His inability to move or to speak.

"It's either 'because you can't...' His navel was exposed. " Or because you like this...Stop kicking Killua"

Toneless command, then a hit to the boy's chest that cut Killua's breath. *And he felt it so vividly* - As he thought he would never again, the unburying, the resurfacing of that blazing hate - but oh well, have the rest, the vulture on the ruined meat, the awareness of his exposed body cutting clear as he felt the elder's hand grazing his thigh…. He wouldn't mess with his mind-not-not-not And yet Illumi chuckled, as if reading the boy's gaze.

"I know you brother. Entirely" Those soul-less eyes stared into Killua's orbs "Because I made you into what you are."

"No" A syllable edged like a knife marking a limit.

"You might try to deny it...I once did myself. But you are the cold-blooded killer I trained Kills. The best assassin the family has given"

"No." *Not anymore.*

"...and mine" Illumi's aura rose seeping like venom "I created you. All those machines connected to your body" Illumi took eager the boy's elbows, where once he'd adjusted the electric wires "All the people I forced you to kill until you liked the business on your own-"

"NO" he felt again that scorching-white hate burning his lungs. "NO!"

"YES" Illumi spoke almost breathless, savoring each word, inking the truth with the pocket knife. Killua braced himself- Illumi cut a line down his navel to the open hem of his pants.

He heard himself hissing. Actually feeling the searing cut of the blade against his skin–*No. No -*

"Imagine what would Gon think if he saw you begging. Why don't we build that scenario" He felt Illumi's nails grazing the wound. And a leap of pain. Those eyes burning into his.

"Because you want someone to touch you like I do-"

"NO"

"It's too sad that the one who you want is too naïve to treat you like I do-

"YOU LEAVE GON OUT OF THIS ILLUMI OR I'LL-" Killua felt the shooting rage- knowing he'd crossed a boundary just by calling him by his name- and Illumi stuck a finger to his wound and he howled in pain-while he heard through the rush-
"You don't get to say what gets done...Killua...But don't worry I'll teach him soon, he'll like it as you di-"

Killua managed to lift his arm against him, his hand a claw swift against his neck. "You'll be dead before you try"

It was surprising. He held his killer hand against Illumi's just above his carotid artery for a second in shock.

But he hesitated. And this time he heard the loud crunch. Illumi's hand moved swiftly over his mouth to muffle the scream. PAIN. Illumi pressed the wrist strongly prolonging the affliction around what was mashed bone, observing the boy's expression, wide bottomless eyes. Close your eyes- endure- He had to endure. He had to endure. But the man trailed down with his other hand...lower enough to touch Killua there over his boxers, his pants unzipped.

Time stopped.

"I can imagine Gon's face"

He wrapped his hand around Killua

…No..."No..." his voice was just a whisper as he shifted to avoid it. Don't...please...no

"What? You said please Gon" He murmured mocking

"No, no no no no NO NO! NO!" he felt a wave of nausea hit him. Gon could not be here present, not on the conversation, not on this, he wouldn't allow it. But the man's words seemed to rob his voice away-

"You, Killua, were the one that came here like a golden retriever, I have spoken through your every move, just like my beloved little puppet" An almost demonic lack in tone- then a fierce cut over the first one but deeper. The searing pain arched Killua back and he gasped.

A rush of connection to his body, like lightening up an electricity panel, he felt the pain- the bruises, the cuts, the broken bone, the connection threatened to overcome him. Illumi grazed with his mouth the soft skin of his navel, nearing there... And he tried not to listen, not to break, not to throw up, not to feel, and a knot closed his throat… a knot that had no relation to the pain but to…Gon's image.

Ki-llu-aaa

"Stop kicking " Illumi bent his knees with strength to stop his thrashing, opening them to allow-

"NO" he kicked him and fought- He didn't want this...Escape.

He was slapped again "So you want things faster"

He was pushed down the bed and felt against his skin a black hunger that devoured, him a hand over his lips, then a mouth against his own-no

"Nggh!" Killua tried breathing but Illumi forced open the boy's mouth. And he felt the blood on his back, the faintness, he was losing blood from the gash. Killua shut his eyes. When He parted his lips and left for the neck, Killua breathed but a finger was introduced into his mouth. He tasted blood.

"So you like it Killua? Your blood?" No. But before he could react another flesh was introduced into his mouth. Shock. He gagged trying to pull away. Illumi yanked his hair to lift him to his waist "You
try anything stupid and I'll kill him." And then he proceeded to thrust himself into his mouth. "I'll be delighted"

Not…not happening...

Air. He needed air...he gagged... pain...air. His words came as if underwater, his throat raw-not happening-not happening-

"It's so sad. Imagine you are going to give your first kiss with this same precious mouth now holding me" His thoughts were now just images, his hair being yanked-pain- Gon- pain-thrust-air-gag-words… Gon…air… breathe...

"How will you confess him how travelled you are? How could you even dare! Being as disgustingly used like a tooth-brush over and over"

Air!…he…needed…air…Gon…-air…breath… him knowing… gag, air, Killuuaa Gon's voice. Extending the vowels... It went on an on... It went on and on and on. It went on and on. Until Illumi pulled out. And he was a mess.

Forceful intake of air.

The boy choked as he hit the bed.

Sob of air. Illumi lowered himself to spread the boy's legs and take of his pants. He closed on himself. Air- Resisting the grasp, clenching his fist. Feeling the blazing agony on the gash near his hip- Air Air. His mind tried to grasp something. His lungs were burning, a roar in his ears. Not registering that he could not breathe, just sob for air and choke lying on one side, folded on himself, his fist clenched tight... Sob… Air... Sob... Gon... Air... Sob... Hate... Air.

There again, again againagain. He was there again…. He felt Illumi hardening against him, he was there again again.

"This is most interesting. I haven't seen you like this since you were so small" Illumi whispered-probably feasting on the wetness down his cheeks and his open eyes, his chest hitched with no control. Illumi gently cupped the boy's face… and the boy's knuckles whitened, his clench so fierce. And the cold spidery hands stopped at the boys pants.

A wave of tiredness hit him. He was sick... He wanted things to be over, just a warm bed, safe alone, let it end. He felt the iron cold fingers around his waist and he shut tight his eyes. He was being taken the pants along the boxers. Let this end. Killuaa realized he was hearing himself crying. He knew what part was coming. Make it stop.

Time edged down. His waist was lifted, Illumi stopped to loosen his belt, to take it now off completely, maybe to tie him- and Killua changed of plan. He was leaving and taking Gon safe away. They could leave on the boat to wherever. An endless sea would be better than this. He had to escape this. Escape this. He couldn't, he just couldn't anymore... He thought he'd be able to put up with this, but he couldn't take it. He couldn't. He kicked trying to free himself.

"Ow!"

Disbelief. He'd kicked Illumi on his chest with both his legs, and tumbled him.

He had.

He made a run for the door.
It was open.
He'd crossed it.
He was running

_Escape_

_He was free._

Arms encircled him

"NO!"

He fought.

With nails and teeth.

His hand, the broken one, was useless as he bit and scratched his way out. But he was dragged and thrown to the bed violently. He lost sense of orientation, but still tried to stand again. Fight, his hand clawed. But he was flipped and his head was pushed against the mattress... A body pressed him to the bed, the weight immobilizing him. He heard him preparing himself, _No, he wasn't ready he wasn't please no_-- then two hands grabbed his hips and separated his thighs NO-NO-NO He tried to move and a hand pushed his head down PLEASE _NO NO NO-

Cry of pleasure.

Killua's howl.

**PAIN**

Illumi pulled out and thrust again.

_This is not happening_

He heard his own voice howling, as he was pushed against the blanket to muffle him... he heard himself screaming like never before- _PAIN_- he couldn't switch to dead mode -_PAIN_, burnt, he was begging stop, _let it stop "STOP!"_ feeling down all the _searing PAIN_, he hissed -_WHY_- pain - _WHY-_ Illumi grabbed his hips firmly and thrust further into him, his name being called AGH _PAIN_ stop! Stop! _STOP! -PLEASE-PLEASE- HE WOULD BEG JUST PLEASE _NO- Rip, skin being torn._

"AAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAGHHHHHHHHHHH!" _PAIN_ shot up his spine- he roared- _STOP THE PAIN- "STOP!"

_Let him die_

He cried now freely as he tried to be deaf to Illumi's rhythm, and felt sick, _let me die_ he cried, but Illumi's arms surrounded him, embraced him to stop the thrashing and he just panted and went further in, he was being torn, broken, burnt _searing pain, pain pain pain_. Only that blazing white pain. _PAIN_.

Killua howled...

And gradually... he felt... numb...
Numbness.

His body had shut down.

He breathed. Blood down there was making things easier...

And suddenly he was far, far... system shut-down far... time seemed to float in a different way... He did not gather when Illumi escalated his gasps, holding his limp shoulders, nor when the man cried a silent gasp of pleasure arching his back to one last time into Killua's dead body. He did not register as he was filled with stuff he'd rather not know off... He did not register when Illumi pulled out. Words from afar were being spoken by him "Broken toy..." He would say..."served its purpose for know", "broken...broken...broken" He did not care... he was so far and drowsy. And he was observed at, and he felt so tired... He did not notice when Illumi left the room. From far above he tried to move... it pained... and so he kept still for hours on end... drifting...

He only registered the last words Illumi had spoken before he'd left...words that hung in the air...and painted the ceilings... and drifted as haunting echoes... "I'll return to the ship in one week. Tell anyone and I'll take him away with me. I will. Then I will make sure you find him...that is , you find his body floating overseas"... toneless murmur.

...A door closed... and from the corner of his mind he thought he had to go back and protect Gon...Gon But then the ceilings and walls slowly faded to black...

-Catch me!

Gon was running... the hills deepened the afterglow of the sunset. Each blade of grass and each tree gently blurred with the island's breeze...

He ran after him, after him, after him. Feeling the wind against his hair. Gon turned to smile.

-Ki-llu-aaa!

-I can't! You're too fast! I'm...too far...

He felt the grass under his feet. And the wind against his skin. And the green blur in front...

-Come on dumbass! I know you can! Don't give up so easily. Catch me!

...I can't...

An extended hand

Come- Gon was smiling. -Run with me Killuaaa

...Swimming. He was swimming under water. He was floating in black water... He floated, unbreathing,still. He lifted slowly his arm. Trying to reach to the surface of consciousness...

But there was no surface. Only water. He could not breathe-

He opened his eyes. His fists were clenching the covers. He barely realized it was still dark. He moved slowly...
PAIN. The room went hazy. Back to black.

He awoke again.

It was still so dark...
It was so so cold.
He was shivering... He was still drifting.

He tried to move.

Pain

He had to move. He tried to lift himself...

Ow Ow Ow

He breathed. Ok. Again...

He moved slowly...

He managed to raise himself. He knelt naked, blinding pain. He took the room, in the darkness. He was alone... He grabbed a fistful of the sheets...Pain. Slowly tried clean the smeared patches of skin across his body with them. His thighs. All of it. Slowly as the pain would allow. The wounds had stopped bleeding...Down there too...Slowly, he reached out... his boxers... He pulled them on, with effort. Then his pyjama pants... he stared at some rags...his pyjama top was ruined. He finished his movements with effort. And fell against the bed exhausted. He smelt the blood. And Him... he could smell Him. It bothered him. It itched his skin.

You can do this...

You've done this before...

He lifted himself once more and sat at the edge of the bed... Pain bothered him... a known pain. He slowly aimed to walk...

Step...

And he staggered falling on his knees. He bit his lip.
And he pulled himself together and aimed for the door. He opened it.

Zombie walking slowly. There was pain on his every move but he was elsewhere... Halls appeared to his sight as if in slow motion.

Step. After step...When he turned a corner, reaching the deck, he stopped. He'd fallen to his knees again because of the pain...

The sea that he'd stared at hours before now seemed unrecognisable. The deck, the moon, the halls, they all seemed unfamiliar.
At the edge of his mind... the pain he was still pushing back, unacknowledged.

Half an hour later he made the effort to reboot his mind. His warm bed was waiting he told himself from far off .

He mustered strength somewhere to stand up.
He'd been shivering. He was shivering. His limbs moved him.
He'd reached his room.
He opened the door.
All of its dark corners felt alien to him
But on the bed...Gon...
Gon slept.

_Gon was ok._

He went into the bathroom... and he slumped to the floor. Slowly pain made him lean his whole body against the cool tiles... He rested there.

In his chest he felt nothing really. Just tiredness.

He closed his eyes. Images. Torn images of it all... broken jigsaw pieces that lacked sense as he felt like floating through them...

Long time passed before he slowly sat up. Pain.

Slowly he addressed the wounds with toilet paper if they continued to bleed...

He felt reality slowly edging down. Time felt more real and so did the pain. He decided to change his clothing, which was stained with blood and... semen... and hide it. He put long dark pajamas to hide all the bruising. As he did he saw the word written on his back. But it just made him stare startled before he covered it. Then he went to bed slowly. And slowly he was by Gon's side who was fast asleep. He felt so cold...his teeth were chattering. He tensed his muscles to stop but it was too painful... He curled and closed his eyes. Gon was so warm...he was still shivering. He couldn't stop shivering...

"Killua?"

His blood froze.

He did not answer

"Killua. You're shivering" A very drowsy and sleepy voice. He felt Gon sitting up.

He looked at Killua who had his eyes closed. And he covered the boy, tucking him with all the quilts. One over the other. With care he made sure he was well covered.

"There you go"

Gon dropped dead weight to bed and snuggled closer.

He felt Gon's hand loosely over his shoulder...so warm...

And Killua suddenly closed his eyes in anger... he fought back the tears of rage. He didn't have any. He just was a fucking liar, a fucking dirty liar...

And nothing had changed...
...yes...

...44% of victims of sexual abuse are under age 18, rainn statistics.

Any thoughts on it?

- ...Review
Gon was observing the sea… the sun rising, gently touching the tanned skin on his shoulders. And far off there was an island.

On its cliff there was a silhouette.

He was overcome with a certainty. Outlined against the dawning, sky, at the edge of the green cliff, that figure, it had to be Ging. As Gon stood to stare, the figure, draped in those vast clothes of his, turned to face him. And as far as he was, the man reached a hand.

Find me Gon

And Gon smiled.
So he was exactly as he’d imagined

I will Ging.

Gon felt the sun warming his closed eyelids… it was a nice feeling. And close by, Killua’s scent. He decided to stretch longly.

It was itching him, the need to go and check if they were near an island with a cliff. He yawned and sat in the bed. And he looked lazily at Killua, at his side.

He seemed fast asleep, curled on himself…

Covered as if he was freezing.

He did seem tired. Kurapica had been right about that.

Only then he remembered. Oh no!

And he hesitated. Should he wake him up?

Yeaaah
"Killua! Killua! We missed it!"

Nope. No answer. It was unusual for the hyper vigilant ex-assassin, but he wouldn't give up, or you don't know Gon Freeces.

"Killua! Ki—llu—aa—"

Albino deep in sleep. Gon took his shoulder gently, to shake him.

"killu-

And next thing he knew he was on the floor.

Uh? Oh, Killua had pushed him a bit violently. The albino sat there, his eyes wide open. He stood disoriented for some moments, taking the scene. Suddenly he understood.

"sorry Gon..." He whispered weakly

"what were you dreaming of? The ring tower?" Gon inquired as he broke into his usual smile again, returning to their bed. And doing so he remembered his objective. "Oh right! Killua, we forgot to watch the sunrise! And I did not wake you up"

Killua seemed lost for some seconds before he remembered.

"Right..." he said faintly "Well, I did not wake you up either..." His voice sounded hoarse.

Killua closed his eyes feeling pain on the wrist. God. Was that still not on place?

Suddenly pain crushed through his body.

He winced and curled again underneath the blankets. Coming up with some quite creative swearings inside his head in the process. PAAAAAIN

Where was his blessed mechanism now eh?

He tried to find again the warm numbness in which he'd been floating just a while ago. He HATED mornings.

"Hey let's get breakfast and go out again!" Gon's radiant call came as if from underwater…

"-I need to check for a particular island like seriously, and we could show Kurapica and Leorio all that we saw yesterday also and-.

But he'd stumbled with the the albino's grimace half concealed by the pillows.

"......sorry Gon ...but I... feel sick" and the voice under the blankets sounded like sandpaper to the albino because of its frailty. Ugh.

Well... at least he wasn't lying. Expected silence and-

"you are sick?"

The albino felt a weight by his side and a hand checking his forehead temperature.

"oh no." Gon's eyes widened a bit "I think you might have a fever"…

Figures.
Killua looked up. And he loosened up a little in those chocolate honey eyes.

"damn Killu, you have the flu. That would explain why your voice is so hoarse- wow you're shivering…"

Right. He'd been _chattering_… how mundane. It was just because he'd felt the cold air outside, and their bed was so warm. Tiredness closed his eyes to cast out Gon's outrageously unbelieving face.

"You are sick"

"mmm"

"Why?"

"mmm"

Gon wasn't satisfied.

"You are sick probably because we swam till late… I'm so sorry killu!"

"I threw you to the water first. Don't take my win" he said faintly.

"I shouldn't have bugged you to drive till so late..." gon hesitated.

"hah. That was fun"

"But how _are_ you sick? You must feel awful! How can you be sick? What should I do? "

"Gon, trust me I've been worse."

He knew this was just his mind lacking a bit in training after all. His body had allowed the fever to creep in.

But Gon had already taken out from the closet another quilt and had frantically thrown it over his friend.

He didn't know how to handle a situation where Killua was sick. He was never sick. "Do you need anything? Of course you do, I'll bring you breakfast, and...and look in the mess for your game boy! And I'll make sure Kurapica comes here to check you- Or Leorio! I'd forgotten He's a doctor no?" all words jumped at Killua so hyper it made the corner of his mouth lift a little.

" -SO first-first-first I'll start cleaning for them guys to come here!" Gon said critically.

"...have to see that" Killua murmured.

Gon dived heroically into the monstrous mess of a room they had, as he repeated outloud his to-do chores. Killua noted how he managed to leave behind a messier assortment of magazines and dirty laundry...

He... He felt pain…. And so he rested his eyes on Gon…

On his side of the room, Gon felt a bit guilty. It was like the time he'd intoxicated Killua with his cooking. The raven put in a corner all the empty pizza cardboards, thinking how, seriously, he was a danger sign that had grown legs; No wonder some Zoldicks thought he was not the best influence for their heir… leave it to him to manage to poison and make sick a terminator in the span of three years.

On the corner of his mind Gon felt somewhat a bit discouraged… he didn't want to admit it but he'd
been looking forward to go out on the adventure today. Maybe a bit too much. It was difficult to pretend he hadn't been expecting it, to find some clue of Gin on the islands.

That was their real quest. That had always been their real quest, since that night on Whale Island by the fire, where they'd come to an agreement. Netero's mission was just an excuse meanwhile they searched on the exact locations they needed too go.

He looked at Killua. Oh, right, concentrate island-boy. Or that nickname Killua used to call him… Ok Gon, you have a sick friend. What should he do?

"I'm calling Leorio right now" Gon adopted a commanding voice, as he searched for the cell phone around the mess.

He barely missed Killua murmuring a negative.

"uh?"

"No doctor" he muttered.

"Of course doctor" Gon dismissed him with patience, still searching.

"I don't need it."

"like doh you do!"

"that even a phrase?" Killua murmured playfully

"Yes. And yes doctor " Determination marking his movements.

"...Kurapica would get a toothache with your grammar, boy"

"don't detour me! You have to see a doctor! I order so!" assertiveness weighed his command, but then he heard a faint giggle "Now what"

"detoour" The albino giggled weakly. Pain always stitching its way higher... crisscrossed with Gon's voice and his funny words and he was so tired...

"what with it?"

"its a weird word" Killlua grinnned with sleepy eyes. And he giggled. "detoour". Where his throat was raw and his back sore, the giggles crept further.

"Ok. Now I'm really worried" Gon stated. On his hand was finally the graced cellphone, that now was being dialed. But a control remote was tossed at him with dexterity. The offensive succesfully managed to knock away the gadget from Gon's hands. Gon stared from the dismantled pieces on the floor to Killua's face, but this one halted him.

"Forget it. No Doctor. And I'm sleeping now"

"GEEZ" Gon exhaled. "Ok...you sleep now" he sat " I'll bring Leorio later. "

"No" Gon heard his voice muffled from under the covers.

"Yes you must see the doctor Killua! He'll give you medicine!"

Killua bursted out laughing and only then Gon realized he was actually echoing Mitosan. Wow.
He thought the moment would never come. Rolling his eyes he placed a hand again over the boy's forehead to check his temperature.

He had a fever. And Gon felt an unfamiliar tug on his chest. Worry?... His silver hair fell messily over his brow...Almost unconsciously, he tenderly caressed some strands away from his face.

But Killua closed his eyes tightly, disturbed.

"Don't...Don't do that"

The known pang of guilt sank him further in the bed....but right now he couldn't stand the thought of being ...touched...

_Not... and Gon's interrupted gesture hung in the air for a fleeting moment... Killua exhaled, feeling the room swaying on its own volition. He knew there in the bed lied his body sewn to this dark vocabulary... meanings that were threatening but somberly familiar, they lingered where his skin ceased being his own, where phantom traces encripted a whole depth of things that wouldn't be verbalized. And who cared, they were too darkly tangled to begin to unravel... not now, not at least with a sore back, a raw throat and a dead mind._

Gon was examining him with honeyed humble eyes...

"Ok " And his eyes had been scared, something seldom seen there. So sitting down he added, almost to himself, a determined "You'll be fine."

That was always the operation he ran in his mind. Something dark couldn't be true, wouldn't be true for him, therefore it wasn't. His voice was so serious and sure he made you believe it. Sure. He'd be fine. Why not?

He did not deserve a Gon taking care of him. Nor bringing him breakfast and all he'd said. He wondered if the Whale Island kid would dare touch him had he known what had happened.

Suddenly last night washed bitterness to his mouth. And with it he felt the pain beginning to grow from bothersome to the slightest unbearable…

Gon was telling him his dreams and wonders as he changed in front of him while talking, while Killua listened from afar. Never had they minded with things like that. They both were comfortable in the familiarity they'd created for each other….He'd had to find an excuse to change his clothes in the bathroom for some time.

He gave up on choosing a lie, his actual state of mind depriving him of his usual cunning liar side. He'd leave it to later…

There went the days of swimming shirtless.

Gon was laughing at something…

The albino took every word, every expression and smile as an opportunity to sidetrack his mind. Closing down tabs and windows overlaid in his head and slicing his nerves, closing the dull stabs that crept up bothering him like alarm pop ups..

_Focus…_

Almost all of Gon's outfits were green.

He tried one of the like again...
But there it was again, words that came and went, and only Gon's eyes that surfaced in between the winding pain...

Killua closed his eyes. He felt pain all over his body. His sinews and ligaments, the flesh over his bones, his very bones to the marrow under incandescent dull pain. Agh...patience. His muscles groaned like having been stung by bees. Or aflame in the kind of throb you feel when your fingers get squeezed on the hinges of a door. That whitewashed pain, permeating different surfaces against his back and navel, burning at the gash on his hip and down there... it waved to the background of his mind with dullness, to pierce sharply to the front by every faint movement. Draining out every ounce of patience and will he possessed...

...He did not want to touch his wrist, he did not want to move at all, but to stay still, still. Still in nothingness.

Not to think or feel again.

"So i guess it was just a dream...weird huh?" but he caught Killua's violet eyes that now stared emptily ahead.

"Ki-llu-aa" Gon appeared in his field of vision suddenly. "...so I guess it was a boring dream"

"uh? no"

"where you hearing?"

One eyebrow raised, Gon dared him with those caramel eye the albino had never been able to lie to...

"Sorry... I...am so tired..". Gon smiled warmly.

"Then you sleep now. I'll go bring breakfast" The tanned boy began to leave.

"no wait,"

Gon looked back,

"Gon..." he breathed… pain was horribly sharpening all edges… "ah, don't leave "

The inquisitive gaze was not met. But after some moments Gon sat beside him...

"I will wait until you fall asleep. Its early anyways…Meanwhile I'll look for your game boy"

He received that tilted smile, as those violet eyes sleepily thanked him...

Those eyes and Gon almost forgot about the island with the cliff he'd wanted to chase off.

"Sleep"

He barely nodded... before allowing himself to lose the bare thread of consciousness he'd been holding so tight.

Wires and cables cover all his body. He's wearing shorts and nothing more. He feels the bruises, the belt lines. Today's practice has taken hours longer. He was hanging, his body limp with exhaustion - a discharge of electricity ran through his small body. Pain. It's a dull second were all the signal occupying his brain is seeking freedom of the pain. Let it end. He can't breathe. But he doesn't scream.
The horrible pain connects a ray of electricity to his wrist and the pain worsens. Then it stops. Drowsy he calls again "Let me out bro. It doesn't hurt me anymore. Just cut it out.-" and his voice is that of a child...just interrupted by doubling pain. And he learns that it could get more intense. Cause there was always room for something more painful, more horrible and dark. Another discharge and he finds himself biting his lip to avoid the scream. His wrist can't stand that electricity it's horrible. But it is. It is set higher, the voltage. And he knows finally that cord snap inside and he is giving him what he wants. He is screaming. For the longest seconds all his mind knows is the pain. Let him die...

Through the haze he hears his father screaming somewhere, since long it was enough, you'll kill him, a slap to Illumi. The words fade, pain.

But he's only left with the sensation that Illumi won.

Again.

And again.

He woke up with a start. He'd been screaming... He took the scene in front of him wide eyed without understanding. He was being shaken by Gon, who was repeating his name. Suddenly realization hit him. He was on his room. He'd been dreaming.

As if someone had adjusted the volume, he heard Gon's voice.

"Killua!"

And suddenly he realized- he was shaken- Gon was shaking him still-touching his shoulder-hand

Oh!

And he jumped out of the bed, freaked out. He landed three feet away from where Gon was.

Pain!

And he felt to his knees as pain shot through his spine.

Ugh..

He was in their room. The clock generously informed him it was hour and a half later.

So he'd fallen asleep.

And Gon couldn't touch him yet, he had to take a shower first. Mandatory. Whatever he felt that would kill the real immediate... dirt.

"Killua! Are you alright? You were screaming!" Gon attempted to come closer again, but stopped, not knowing if Killua wanted him near in violent-disoriented-mode.

Killua read his confusion and tried to breathe.

"I'm sorry. I just.. I'm... sorry. I was..." he laughed out of breath "just dreaming about battling Illumi... Can you believe it?" he said, trying to imprint nonchalance to his voice as he let his back fall against a wall. Somehow the first thing that came to his mind had been the truth.

"Wow!" Gon plopped in front of him with wide eyes. "How epic!" His eyes were caramel pools.
Killua smiled.
"Totally"
"Was it too terrible?"
"neh"
"You were screaming"
"… well yeah.." Killua felt embarrassed. He hadn't had one of those dreams for years. The dream wasn't much he thought. He did not know why it scared him so…

He was still surprised at his own boldness, saying the truth like that.
"...Is he still around here, on the ship?" Gon suddenly asked.
"Lets hope no" Killua whistled, feeling honest sincerity weighing his voice as he felt his back against the cool wall…

Gon was now examining him intently
"what"
"…so when are you going to do it?"
"what?"
"…fight him"

Killua averted his eyes to stare at the roof.
Yeah, answers were too entrenched inside him for it to be safe to look any other way. He felt stillness and silence blanketing them both.

But then Killua looked at Gon tilting his grin "I should have asked that to the chocolate ladies"

Gon smiled. He suddenly stood up in front of Killua and extended him a hand.
"Come, go back to bed now"

Killua nodded. The jump had been an idea his body was protesting loudly against. He still was in pain. But then he shook his head.

"Bathroom yours in fifteen, I'll take a shower"

"oh, but not now! I'm bringing you breakfast! Besides you'll get even sicker with your hair wet" Gon protested. Wow, so he really activated his Mitosan like mode no?
Suddenly he realized Killua fidgeted with his sleeve as he stood up slowly.

"I just really need it... I feel the salt of the sea itching my skin" not exactly the sea. He blocked it.
"Mmm…ok… but Kurapica is coming in to check you soon with Leorio. Try take a short shower. And then I'll come back so we can have breakfast together."

Killua felt slightly cornered. He had to avoid the checkup. He barely heard when Gon said good bye to go out on his errands. He meditated as he headed for the bathroom.
Stupid fever, he cursed it, just a childhood mechanism damn remnant.

It had been a way of passive aggressiveness outlet; his patient way of protesting against the training he was submitted day to day in his earlier childhood. He ran a high fever. He didn't control it, yes. But it did come quite handy when he pursued being allowed to rest.

It was rendered ineffective though as training escalated. And so, as if his body had been wise, he never had a fever again after he got the message it wouldn't take him anywhere.

It had grown into a childhood story they told him about himself…he'd never been sick after that. Vulnerability was an idea he'd learned to despise along the years.

Maybe that's why he was drawn from the beginning to Gon...

It was not that Gon wasn't vulnerable. It was that he was so…while being as well strong…while blinding all with that strength.

Or something more complex he decided he was too tired to fathom.

Maybe he could feign being asleep by the time Leorio arrived, so they would not bother him until he woke up. Which would be a day after, when he would act as if being perfectly fine so no one would think he was still sick.

He had already admitted to himself, very against his will, that he needed at least a day of being left at peace. Right now he felt his every bone was aching. And a serious lack of disconnection. It was as if he'd made a regression in all his capacities. It was as if he was weak. And he wasn't. Or he was. And he felt the familiar hate akin to that last word.

He dragged himself into the shower in a bad mood. He closed the bathroom door. And he put lock… and took off his pajama top to stare at his back… at the carved word…

_Puppet_

He reeled his thoughts away of the meaning under the cut. He turned the water on to the hottest, so that all could get killed by the heat. He stepped in.

And he closed his eyes, just letting the droplets fall… and finally, too pained and dizzy of standing so long, he slid to the floor.

He poured a ton of shampoo on his hair. He rinsed the silver strands again and again.

He only had one good hand it seemed. He took the slippery soap and rubbed it strongly against his skin. AGH. He was in pain everywhere. Too kneel, to sit… But slowly he was relearning how to let the pain be as he laid on the shower floor.

He reinitiated his system again and again to find somewhere will.
He rubbed his chest, and the wound in his navel stung from afar. He rubbed his waist, his thighs… his back. The most painful cut burned on his hip to the contact of soap. Finally he brushed his teeth under the shower. He felt his throat raw, despite all the toothpaste added again and again, it was still raw. He.. felt covered in the black shadow that his brother...overcast...and... But he knew that feeling was something different from the real filth..

He sighed. He needed to get out of there fast if he wanted to feign sleep.

He dried himself and put on some new pajamas just because. The effort of all his moves making him
decide he wouldn't leave his bed today.

He planned on throwing away the dirty clothing, all of it, burn it.

As he planned these details he left the bathroom. But his thoughts were stopped mid-track as Kurapica and Leorio patiently stood there sitting respectively on couch and little chair. They'd been reading an old newspaper and were commenting when Killua smiled glad to see him.

"Fuck"

"Hey there, how are you doing fellow?" Leorio stood up to greet him.

"yo"

"hi Killua" Kurapica said brightly.

"Soo...I knew your idea to escape with Gon for a small adventure that late was reckless!" Leorio adjusted his glasses.

Kurapica sighed knowingly.

"Ah, save your breath, It won't halt them from doing it again"

"Yup. Listen to the blond" Killua added. Inwardly his mind raced for an escape. Breakfast or too tired, or busy, but with what?

"Gon was hyperventilating about you being sick. Lets see what you've got" Leorio turned onto serious matters, clasping his hands. Kurapica snuggled comfortably on the leather couch.

"Can I stay here while you're checked?"

"Actually guys, I don't need this. And I really want to sleep. No means to sound rude but don't worry and go have breakfast" he winked at the pair.

"Your voice...does your throat hurt?" Kurapica inquired.

"i'm fine" Killua had paled imperceptibly as he dismissed it with a wave of his hand.

"Ah, let's get done with it now, I brought my suitcase and all" the doctor insisted.

"Unnecessary. Gon seriously overreacted"

"But he is right, you do look awful... let Leorio check your temperature at least" Kurapica interceded.

Killua whistled. "Concerning aesthetics I don't know, but I'm an ex assassin so believe me, I've got a nice health insurance. I'm fine"

"Oh yeah! Concerning aesthetics, by the way, there are two girls parked outside waiting for you to go out" Leorio smirked. "and there are others in the ship forming the club! It's outrageous! you and Gon are taking out all our possible catches! And you're underage!"

"Our 'catches'?" Kurapica said a little vexed "girls are not my priority right now if you must know Leorio, I find that quite a puerile activity" The Kuruta had popped an eyebrow

"you find girls to be a puerile activity, so I guess boys it is then uh? And somehow it didn't come out
as unexpected …" Killua grinned as Leorio bursted out laughing. Kurapica sighed and ignored them.

"I did not meant it that way. And right now I would punch you. But Gon wouldn't be happy, no?"

The undertone implied was barely missed by the zoldyck.

"That moron outside is just a pussy when he sees me tired"

"You don't feel sick?" Leorio asked frowning.

"I'm fine."

"Killua" The blond faced him "you haven't seen yourself in the mirror. I've never seen you this...pale. You're like a ghost with black rings under his eyes. You look feverishly sweaty, and you're voice is gravel... You're not on drugs are you?"

Leorio laughed at this as Killua's eyebrows jumped to hide entirely under his bangs

"Of course not" he answered annoyed.

"Nah, Kurapica, it's probably a flu. Killua, I just need to know if its viral or not , if I give you antibiotics or other meds. The sooner the better" Leorio smiled reassuringly while attempting to check his forehead temperature. Killua flinched away a little disturbed.

"hey, you're hot.."Leorio said worried

"The girls outside are of the same opinion"

"Killua get serious. This is never a good sign. I'm pretty sure you have a fever"

" Ah" He exhaled "I was quite eager to take it as a compliment"

Kurapica eyed him and tried to touch his forehead, but the boy retreated a little.

"Ok Guys. So maybe I have a little fever. But I really don't need this entire circus around me. If I feel bad I'll go to the infirmary, but thankyou very much, i'm the one taking care of my back"

As if a Zoldick would go to an infirmary.

Leorio looked at the pale boy, as if trying to see something on his look. It unnerved Killua. Kurapica however continued.

"I think that in this one I trust Leorio more than a ship nurse" he said kindly. "don't you?"

"I don't need medical attention of any type!"

"And what if Gon poisoned you again without knowing?"Leorio retorted

"then I'll send him to Siberia for some twelve years. Now if you'll excuse me, I'll get my breakfast and sleep. You'll see me as new tomorrow so buh-bye" he said as he went to open for them the door.

But Kurapica rolled his eyes, blocking his path "and here we were thinking Gon was the stubborn one" He sighed

"Look Killua, we have to see what you got first"

"Can't it wait until breakfast?"
"Maybe you can't eat but crackers if it's an infection on your stomach, or maybe you can't eat of a
determined specie of food, because you could be reacting to an allergy or maybe-"

"shall I quote Gon about the parenting?..." Killua said snapping suddenly

There was a brief silence.

Leorio opened his suitcase.

"Kurapica, don't worry, I'll check him right now. But if you mind, could you leave the room? I saw
Gon pretty anxious with all this and now he is outside in the kitchens all by himself. He practically
thinks Killua is going to die or something."

"Well, with those bags under his eyes, I understand him" Kurapica yawned and stretched. "Good
luck Killua" He eyed him and left swiftly.

Killua felt his death sentence being raised. A moment of silence followed. Leorio looked at him
thoughtfully.

"Ok Killua… You are frightened, I can tell" He said seriously.

Killua sighed, his hands in his pockets. Some years of comradeship could do wonders.

But then Leorio grinned "Probably you've never been to a medical checkup, so I tell you, right now,
there's nothing to worry. On this part there won't be syringes, or weird stuff. It's quite simple. I want
to hear your heart and hear you breath, and then I'll take your temperature ok? In your case, I don't
think anything more will be needed."

Killua internally swore.

"like that you'll let me be?"

"yes"

Killua thought. He did not know how to free himself of this one. What could he say? How could he-

Leorio had taken his shoulder and he'd instinctively cringed and pulled it away. Leorio released him
disconcerted.

"sorry…I was distracted…" Killua muttered. Still a bit edgy it seems.

"Don't worry. I need you to sit down"

He sat on the bed hesitantly. He felt the fever clouding his thoughts. How could he get out of this.
That's what you should be thinking. Not paralyzing. Leorio took from his suitcase a stethoscope.

"Ok, I need you to lift your shirt, or take it off"

No

It wasn't necessary for him to say it out loud, his aghast expression comunicated it all. Leorio thought
it was quite familiar to the one the albino put when he'd tried something distasteful.

Leorio sighed " I'll be easier for me to hear your heart and your breathing. Particularly your
breathing" the doctor pointed worried. Only then the albino realized he was breathing with difficulty.
Bruised rib? Some boring shit of the sort.
"You know Leorio, all this is crap really, it's not necessary"

He stood again

"It is. If you don't take care for yourself, at least do it for the fan club outside. And for Gon. Now come, let me see" Leorio approached the boy. And for a moment Killua froze. Suddenly his only reaction was to retreat. And suddenly his steps swayed as the room spun dizzy .

He supported himself on a wall.

"Killu-"

"no"

"uh?why-"

"I'm sorry Leorio, I really want to sleep"

"But-"

"lets do this other day.. I don't think I feel comfortable with lifting my shirt. I get embarrassed easily heh"

"But I've seen you before, you don't seem to have problems with that when you fish with Gon"

"Oh, but this is different." Killua said desperately " This is a medical checkup!" it even came out funny

His heart was racing. It made him dizzier by the moment

Leorio grinned,

"ok now it's not so terrible!" those words, they started to sound as if far off. He clung again to control. But Leorio approached him again and Killua backed to the wall mechanically, alarm crisping him.

"what the...it's not like I'm going to hurt you" Leorio frowned.

Killua raced.. he had to invent an indifferent casual line, the kind of lines he always came up with.. But his eyelids were heavy, his mind so… clouded…

"I …don't want this"

Leorio observed him. He felt a certain lack of air.

"Why"

"I just don't"

"...Killua sit"

Leorio approached the boy… but he tensed up alarmed. The doctor's brow creased

" You're dizzy"

"I'm fine” he snapped
Leorio bit his lip.

"Ok. You win. I really need to check on your fever please, so you know what? lets do this: I'll put the stethoscope over your clothing and you can put the thermometer yourself. You won't have to lift your shirt ok?"

Killua hesitated. If it had to get done… then it was probably the only way of coming out of a checkup without… having to answer tedious questions that held no answer. Killua calculated…and felt the dizziness waving up.

But Leorio's eyes stood his gaze. And he slowly nodded. The doctor as if aware of Killua's alertness, approached slowly and motioned Killua to sit down on the bed.

He did.

The doctor then sat next to him

"Killu, I'll now hear you breath okay?"

Killua nodded. As if somewhere else. Get this done with. Get this done with.

Leorio passed one of his hands down the albino's back to smooth the wrinkles. His shoulder blades tensed under his palm. So he hastened to the stethoscope on his covered back and stood silent.

"Ok, Killu. Breath"

Killua breathed

His heart was racing.

fuck. *Let him not hear it, don't hear it don't hear it*

"Exhale slowly."

Killua did so and felt some difficulty…

"breath again" and Killua breathed.

"...I'm sorry"

and Leorio lifted his shirt up.

Gon hadn't reached the kitchens... He was outside, by the ship's handrail.

Staring at the endless sea.

It was a brilliant morning

… the sky streaked by some faint clouds…

He'd began his trail of thought with the search of a cliff island but he'd ended up on other serious matters.

And now, after all the thinking he'd done, he'd settled only in deciding when had he started to like him… He tried to go back. Had it been when they'd been at the ring tower? Had it been that night at whale island? Or when he rolled on his skate the first time?
He'd been there, with Wing-San and Zushi in the stands, the day Killua fought for the first time seriously with one of the 200th floor masters. The other fighter had been on a wheel chair and seemed quite a nothing until he displayed the electricity.

Sincerely Gon had been excited. Both of them shared that; the thrill that comes of testing oneself when your life is on the line. And he knew Killua was having his toll of fun because of that. And yet, being at the other side- the spectator- he'd learned a new feeling he hadn't been able to place.

He hadn't been expecting- like the entire audience that Ooohed -the electricity. At the exact moment Killua was electrified and the crowd held its breath, he'd sprung to his feet in a wave of protectiveness. It had proven quite unnecessary, as Killua nonchalantly won the dumbass without even moving from his square meter. It was even more enjoyable- for Gon- that when he did that kind of stuff-win fights and kick asses- a darker side of Killua sprung playfully in the corner of his smirk.

Since then, too many battles had passed for Gon to count. He only knew with certainty that each time his friend fought, that feeling of protectiveness arose as clear as that first time. And yet the protectiveness faded the moment both played their life on the edge together. Honestly having fun. Like on Greed Island. Feeling the thrill. Then it was just like following a well synchronized pattern, where each other's move was anticipated, as they threw at each other helps and had fun while their lives could be never guaranteed…

A bet they always took together…

Now...It was as if.. As if Killua had taken a bet alone. For a second, that was what he's sensed. At that moment on the room. When he'd stumbled with that... empty lost stare. He felt cold inside his chest... He sighed. And maybe he'd been wrong...to cast all under what he felt...

Kurapica had flopped at his side.

"hey Gon" he smiled

"hi Kurapica" Gon smiled back

"You know, there's an island you should really check...."

Gon expression changed, as his eyes brightened.

"why?" It always had been dangerous. How one-tracked could his mind be sometimes...

Kurapica laughed. "So not 'which one' first uh? Immediately to the why. Ok."

"...I'm sorry"

No.

But Leorio had lifted his shirt up...

fuck.

Killua had quickly jumped away.

Paralyzed.
And Leorio had lifted his arms. As a guilty man.

But his eyes… Those eyes...

He averted his own. Unable to confront them. He was frozen.

Chapter End Notes

A/N: Yeah…cliffie.

Poll: Whom of you people is reading the manga's new chapters now? *.*
Hi guys. How are you doing? n.n

I worked really like superextra hard to have this chapter on time... I'm fond of you, readers. I wanted to make this chapter 2000 words longer... But oh well...

Ah give me strength guys.. i'm dealing with a lot of stress and not so many good things x.x In moments like these though I do thank that I love to write... and that HXH is publishing without hiatus (heart)

Ooh, don't give to much thought on the flashforward... when its time comes, you'll remember.

I...must...go on standing
You can't break that which isn't yours
I...must...go on standing
I'm not my own
It's not my choice...

There are moments in life that get frozen in our retinas. Those photograph like moments that one revisits and revisits late at night... or during a long journey with dim light. Moments one wonders what was the first movement one did wrong, or what else could have been done. It can be addictive, just to fathom all the possibilities of how one thing could have turned out, had one turned left instead of right...

Had he not chosen these islands or to take Netero's mission at all... had he not followed his brother that day at the deck... had he not been born on that family... had he not been born at all. Had he not met Gon... had the shirt not been lifted at the medicul checkup or had he told the truth from the start... had he lied better, he could have done so much better, had he never spoken at all. Or had he ran away in the beginning, the beginning of beginnings...

Or just rolled by on his skate without asking his name before it all ended so messed up...

...Now his hands, sticky with blood grasped tightly the rail as he stared. He was calling him, extending the vowels... but the frenzy, the fear, it was now all washed away in numbness, he was finally dead inside- He'd finally pulled the trigger, he'd finally took the bullet, and knew what it tasted like, the loss, and now only something twisted could end it all...

And at the moment he'd dared to look at him. in the eye "I'm sorry"- he'd said...

"I'm sorry" Leorio had whispered.

And he swiftly lifted Killua's shirt up.
It only lasted a second, Killua quickly jumped away and moved backwards paralyzed. Pain crushed him in the motion. So fucking much the world seemed to sway but he suppressed it. He tried not to meet the doctor's gaze. And failed.

His eyes...

Leorio lifted his hands as a guilty man. And Killua had a Dejavu. The four of them playing, and Leorio making that same gesture. That time, he could remember, it had been funny. You could tell his arms were too long for his suit when he lifted them... But now in Leorio's eyes he could read the shock. So this was serious. So it was happening. So he'd seen...

"I'm s-sorry I know I said but you were acting weird and- what the hell happened to you? Wh y are you injured, who did this, did you fight with someone? What the hell! Why were you hiding it?"

Leorio seemed really disturbed.

Killua tried to process the new situation. But his mind only took him to meaningless details like Leorio's sleeves, like the pain that crushed him, like the heat weighing his own forehead down and the cold floor at his feet as his friend ranted asking and asking. He didn't want words to form what he already knew, but there the scene lay. And he could only watch: the precarious balance he'd tried so hard to keep... crumbling down like Hisoka's card castles. He'd failed. He'd... failed.

"Killua! what happened to you? come on speak"

The boy was unresponsive. Leorio paled by the second.

"Killua" dark bruises, dried blood, the deep cuts slashed against the pale skin as if a canvas-

But maybe he just wasn't used to see a small body so damaged. Maybe this had a rational explanation, this was Killua, used to whatever since childhood, this was-Maybe it been his family? but they weren't in the ship so-

He tried to reach eye level with the boy placing a hand on the the albino's shoulder.

Wakening at the contact, Killua retreated indifferently, frowning...

"It's none of your business Leorio" he mumbled coldly. He walked away nonchalantly, as if annoyed.

"It is. Then someone did hurt you, who-"

"No, no one did, and anyways Not Your Business" he snapped.

"But if no one did then how- then you're telling me-"

Killua now glared " Have you a hearing disability? Not your fucking b."

"THE HELL IT IS! You're hurt! Have you seen your back? Because I can show you-"

"AND WHAT IS IT TO YOU!" Killua yelled, his eyes now glaring dangerously "I didn't ask for your help! I didn't invite you to come in, and I'm in no mood to keep your pretense- noble doctor -player, so place your butt in your own room and learn to let others be!Or better, I'm leaving"
He pushed past him aiming for the door. But his wrist was taken

"Don't you walk -"

"BACK OFF"

But Leorio abruptly stopped, aghast and not letting go "your….its broken. Your wrist- Killua your – this is the same one that- and its broken" he said startled, as his eyes went from the hand he now held carefully to the- boy's face, but Killua pulled it away angered, and hissed.

"Killua who-'"

"it's nothing for heaven's sake!"

But as the albino moved backwards he tripped and supported himself in a wall loosing balance. He felt crushing pain, oh pain in his every move. He shut his eyes tight he could not think straight. The world was swaying and Leorio's eyes were alarmed, gaping

"Killua, if someone hurt you we-"

"shut up!" He closed his eyes.

"You're dizzy"

"Idiot, just shut up!"

There was a silence.

"Killua sit. I'm going to look for the others right now"

"…don't" His voice was hoarse. And he felt the rush of dizziness to his head.

A hand took his shoulder again. Keeping him in place. And suddenly all his capacity was now focused on not losing consciousness. He could not risk passing out with Leorio knowing, he had to control the situation… but his head felt heavy and breathing made him dizzier by the second… He felt himself slowly edging to the ground, his back against the wall… Leorio had seen him… he was a step closer of Gon…knowing… and if he…knew… then he'd… Illu…mi…and…

Leorio felt his heart reach his throat. All his protective instincts triggered at the image of the frail boy in his hands slipping to the ground.

As he closed his eyes the albino's mind was racing, and racing on excuses and plausible lies, but he kept messing up, as breathing got harder, he could not find a good explanation for the wounds, let alone his bizarre reaction… He felt the world moving and a hand to his shoulder keeping him in place.

"Where are you hurt, you have trouble breathing, are you dizzy-"

"Stop it"

Leorio grasp tightened "Killua be reasonable, if someone hurt you I can-"

"you can't" Killua was putting all his effort in not letting the pain get to his eyes. Where was his dissociation, where where where Wtf

"then did someone hurt you? Does Gon know’?’" Leorio murmured.
"Don't tell Gon" Killua snapped his head alarmed, his voice strained. And felt the world spin dangerously at the brusque movement.

"who did this to you-

"no one did."

"was it a battle? I'm calling Gon" Leorio reached for his cell phone with his free hand.

"No"

"I am, you let me no choice"

"No" He stabilized the wavering in his voice. And Killua inhaled, mustering strength as he lifted his own arm. Leorio at first thought the boy was trying to steady himself. But then he let two fingers press lightly the elder's neck as he locked eyes with him. Behind his extended arm, those dark and empty eyes. He was breathing hard.

"Leorio…. I am a killer… You know it." He stared darkly from half lidded eyes as his tongue whispered "I could pluck each artery of your neck out. So I'll tell you what you'll do. You'll put that cell phone down. You'll leave me alone…. You'll go to your room. And… you'll forget about this. Don't… make me …regret it" His voice a low feral growl.

The pail fingers gently applied more pressure on the two vital points on his neck, a cold dead darkness gazing through his violet eyes. Knowing the appropriate pressure could cause Leorio to go from feeling light headed to pass out in some seconds.

Leorio's eyes had widened in horror.

"You're so desperate your resorting to that?" He said in disbelief. "oh so what, you're going to kill me if I don't leave you to swoon in your fever? Kill me then, Killua"

And for a moment Leorio saw it, the flash of pain in the violet eyes before he hid his expression under bangs. He still held his arm… now pressing with more strength. And Killua knew…oh, he did...

The 100% certainty he would have been able to do it… not a second of hesitance...

He'd be able. A human is by nature breakable. Slicing skin, flesh and bone, as if cutting through butter. He could have summoned the bloodlust even. He could have..

...Before he'd met Gon…

Of all of this he was aware and so he closed his eyes.

*That 's the monster …you're trying to help ..Leorio…*

Slowly he let his arm fall down to grasp at the floor for some solid ground, refusing to look up. Anyways the heat at his temples was fogging his vision.

Right now he wanted to die.

A hand placed on his forehead.

From afar he heard Leorio cursing under his breath. Moments later a couple of pills were shoved into his mouth.
Ice cold water burnt his lips. He swallowed. Feeling the pills raw against his throat.

"I have to take you to a hospital. You're burning"

"No." He whispered.

Leorio cursed again. Killua heard him pacing on the room… And then going to the bathroom. He heard the water running. And Leorio back

"You get in there now"

Killua closing his eyes, tilted a weak grin

"…I was …just… there"

"and now you're going back in there . I need to lower your fever." Leorio said, alarm thickening his voice. He knelt and swiftly flipped open the buttons of the albino's pajama shirt. "this is dangerous, you're burning-

But he saw Killua's eyes widen. The boy had tensed almost painfully under his grasp. And next thing he knew, Killua's foot had made contact with his stomach and had sent him across the floor.

OW He knew how to kick. The doctor curled in pain. But he quickly knelt to stand, ready to snap out. But he was frozen at the image

Killua, eyes shut tight, had lifted his head as in sheer pain. His shirt was open. And you could see, not only the many purple bruises against the so pale skin… one which was black… but the long cut that went from his navel down… and the horrible gash on the hip. It was what looked the nastier. Leorio suddenly felt sick.

It was a second before Killua covered himself, crossing his arms, his grimace masked by feral anger.

"FUCK OFF!"

"Killua-I'm-sorry-I"

"Fuck off Leorio, just Fuck off! " He said breathing hard.

"I'm sorry but I need to lower your fever. It's dangerous! You need help!"

"I DON'T"

"YOU DO!"

Suddenly Leorio stood and approached the albino, not caring about what the boy thought anymore, he had to do something

"Don't dare come near me" Killua hissed suddenly feeling panic.

"are you BLIND?"

"I'm not letting you near-" he breathed fast.

"And I'm not letting other friend DIE SICK if I can avoid it!"
Silence fell heavily between them.

The boy looked startled...

Leorio breathed slowly, trying to grasp the situation.

"Killu…ok…look" Leorio paced the room. "ok I need to lower your fever"

The boy just stared emptily ahead. "Ok, Killua, I know, let's make a deal"

Killua winced at the word. He felt about to throw up… but kept silent.

"Look, You don't need to explain yourself to me. And I won't tell anybody about what I see…Nor will I tell anybody if you want to tell me something," he said desperately "I won't tell Gon nor will I tell Kurapica." He spoke slowly, as if handling the weight of his words in his hands.

"In exchange you'll let me take care of you… and of those wounds properly." Leorio knelt in front of the boy "I won't ask… Just… let me help you… please"

The albino remained silent for some seconds. Just focused on breathing. Concern was drawn on the doctor's every feature. Killua hated it. But then he hated it all.

"Killu…please"

"Can't trust you"

Leorio looked at him long, but then nodded in acknowledgment.

"…ok. I understand. Look. I did not do it before, but now, I give you my word. And I have never and will never break my word to anyone I care for." he said determined.

Killua bit his lip.

"…I don't want your help” He shoved the doctor away. The world was starting to spin off its axis again. He determined he needed sugar so he stood up slowly. He gave hesitant steps across the room. and he let himself fall on his knees in front of the minibar. No chocolates. In a second a can was against his lips.

"Killua…please… I don't know how you're able to speak now. I need to lower your fever…please"

Killua drank and sighed with apathy "leave me alone, Leorio"

"Killua...I'm...scared to do so. You need help…"

"You...don't understand. You don't need to be involved" his voice was low

"But I'm already involved"

"No"

"Yes. From the moment I came to care about you. Wouldn't you help me in such a situation if it was the other way round? What would you say if I were injured?"

There was a silence. A silence where he abhorred the doctor...because he was right.

" I won't stop Killua. Else I'm telling, so choose. You. Need. Help; Let. Me. Help"
"ARGH" The can in the albino's hand crushed and spilled its contents on the rug… Killua looked at the ceiling and inhaled.

"Why" he hissed lowly "Why are you so stubborn?" He sighed heavily. "You must have learned it from Gon"

"Maybe. I did learn this from him too, so stick it in your head: Its because you are my friend".

The emphasize strictly based on experience. He knew Killua had problems with identifying stuff of the sort.

Killua closed his eyes...Yep. That was Gon talking through him..

Leorio smiled weakly.

Killua sighed... He felt his hands and feet growing number. His mind...it should be racing...but somehow it felt off and slow.

"No questions" Killua was willing his voice to steady itself … what was he doing, what was he doing..."Not one. and no telling. Anyone." Suddenly he realized he was leaning almost all his weight on the minibar. Defeat? He opened it again to take out a small bottle. Much better.

He felt the edge of not knowing at all what he was doing at the moment, this wasn't part of the plan...

"...I swear, I give you my word" Leorio said gravely. Killua frowned eyes closed.

"...No questions"

"Yes"

"No telling anyone…"

"Yes"

"This did not happen"

"...ok..."

"No telling…Gon"

Leorio felt sadness as he stared at the boy in front... Killua did not return the stare as he opened what appeared to be a small whisky sample. He tossed one at Leorio who automatically grabbed it. His way of saying thanks.

The Zoldick looked at his broken wrist a second… and exhaled heavily.

"I seriously hate you right now" he mumbled.

Leorio smiled, approaching him.

"I know.."

"Nope. You don't know how this will hurt" He gulped dryly from the bottle shutting tight his eyes.

"What?" Leorio had asked while Killua had already tossed the empty whisky away.

"why di-" But Killua, in a grimace of pain, extended his broken wrist, and attempted- Oh, and
succeeded in transforming his hand it into a claw. Broken wrist and all...

A chill ran the doctor's spine

"KILLUA"

"...ah fuck..." He said frowning at the throbbing pain. He felt dizzier by the second, but without hesitation he looked at Leorio directly "Then I guess you treat this wound first." He tilted a devious smile, sweat pearling his forehead. And his claw dived at his own back. He scratched deeply over the skin where he knew he had imprinted that damned word.

"What? NO!" But Killua was done already...feeling in delay his wrist disturbed painfully. He stood hesitantly, and a little dot of red inked his shirt, that slowly spread into a blossoming red flower at the small of his back. His hand was back to normal and he couldn't move it now... at all.

Leorio closed his eyes taking a hand to massage the bridge of his nose.

"why..?"

"already...breaking the rules uh? No..questions" Killua smirked. Dark spots were dancing in his field of vision "And here I was...hoping Gon... would interrupt us ...and save the day..." He was having trouble breathing.

"Killua-

He took hesitant steps towards the bathroom. Black spots sparked in front of him.

"I'm sorry you saw that...But..now I'm ready for the...medical checkup...Now you...want... me in the...bath...tu..."

And suddenly the boy swayed dangerously...

Before falling dead weight to the ground.

"KILLUA!"

Gon was walking determined under heavy foliage. You could barely see the light because of the greenery of the treetops above...

Kurapica had smiled "You know Killua wasn't the first one to discover those caves no? The captain told us about the tribe that left them behind...but he didn't tell us about his discoverer. I wonder why..."

Gon tightened the clasp of his fishing rod.

Biscuit eyes shone like two blue gems "I heard that by age 13 he began developing Greed Island. By age 29 he'd already founded the Luluka ruins and found a way to breed two-headed wolves..."

It had been rumored that one of Gin's famous discoveries, the two headed wolf-breeding, had been done on a small unknown island. He never told the exact location to the Hunter Committee. He just brought the hybrid specimen with himself to prove his existence before letting him free again some months later.

If he was the one to find the caves... then maybe... actually, quite probably...he'd found them here,
on this particular island, whose natural fauna were regular black furred wolves…

He wanted to see them. Although it took him a day to find their nest, he wanted to see them with his eyes.

He was running. He felt it, the determination rushing oxygen to all his muscles, the pent-up energy bouncing him forward. He felt the defiance driving him mad, for just a second, irking him somewhere along his chest. From there blood pumped across his limbs energy, energy enough to make him cross the entire island twice if he wanted, being it the size of York Shin City.

No…he hadn't forgotten Killua… He just needed to do this first.

But suddenly he stopped dead and turned back, the sole of his shoes sliding across the ground to a halt.

His heart beat loudly in the unusual silence…

Don….don…don…

For a moment he could have swore someone had been following him. Kurapica? No. He'd accompanied him, but he was looking on the other side of the island. And it hadn't felt like the kuruta at all.

He swung his fishing rod. But nothing could be sensed around. He waited in case that something chose to make an appearance.

But as nothing came…and the minutes past, he felt more inclined to believe it had been his imagination.

He kept on running.

He remembered Kurapica's last words

-I'm going with you Gon

-I'd rather do this on my own- Gon had beamed with dark determination

Kurapica had laughed

-I know that… But it seems I have my own affairs too on that island…- He sighed heavily.

-is it… the spider?- Gon had suddenly stood up alarmed.

-For the last three islands we've landed, I've been given quite an unpleasant surprise…- He opened his hands. There laid three joker cards. Gon felt a familiar sinking feeling

-Yes.. Hisoka. It's as if he's leaving these toying messages where I happen to wonder alone. They're always stuck in the tree trunk of an old tree- Kurapica looked far ahead.

-Gon… you know he may be following you..- The blond had looked at Gon from the corner of his eye, and Gon couldn't help but nod.

-But.. I think his last target was…Kuroro. And so it is of my interest to speak to him…after all he is wishing to do so as well it seems…
He was floating so comfortably in clouds of warmth…

But annoying consciousness slowly began reattaching body parts to his awareness; a neck to his head, then some hands to his arms, toes tangled in the sheets belonging to a foot… bones weighing him down, sinking him into the bed … But he still felt like floating in cotton, his limbs pleasantly resting…

He tried to stretch, overwhelmingly feeling that glowing haze through his muscles..

mmm…

That's when he realized something was wrong

The absence of pain.

He opened his eyes alarmed. Ugh light! He squinted and simultaneously noticed his body wasn't obeying his commands. He tried to sit, but it was as if each of his arms weighed individually more than the seven gates of entrance at the Zoldick residence… together…

" Killu! you're up" a relieved and weary voice murmured to his right… How are you feeling now? Are you better?" Killua still squinting, tried to assimilate the room. White walls. Oh no. White sheets. Oh noooo..An IV to his left wrist-

"You didn't" Killua felt the fear attempting to narrow his senses as he tried to sit. Failing. His voice was fogged by a lack of strength.

"I knew you'd say something along the lines..." He saw Leorio's blurry face, kind and smiling. The albino noticed his right hand was in a cast.

" You… took… me to a.." he breathed hard, realizing his words were slurry.
"fuck, what …did you… gave... me" His eyes tried to focus Leorio's eyeglasses. He was sitting on a chair very close to the bed.
The doctor seemed drained as he explained.

"I gave you a dosage to kill seven horses together… it seems that's the adequate amount for the drug to act as a painkiller on a Zoldick" Leorio tilted his head.

Killua grasped the sheets and tried to sit. He arms trembled at the attempt, as he cursed under his breath

"no..."

"No Killu, stay back…you need to rest" But the boy had managed to lean into a sitting position. Leorio took a hand to his head "you shouldn't be able to move at all" he sighed.

"what did…you… do?...." Suddenly Killua had looked at him. Directly as he hadn't done before. His violet eyes were still sleepy. And there was pain in them…but of another kind. And Leorio realized he was actually staring at the bare emotions, unmasked.

This was new.

"Killu, it's ok..." he whispered " you fainted in your room. Remember? You really had me going crazy down there, your fever was dangerously high, you could have accessed a seizure..." Leorio trailed. "So I came to the infirmary, showed them my pro-hunter license and rented a room in here. I asked the necessary tools and implements… and shooed all away from this room…and treated
you…"

Killua was now looking at his white hands clasping the sheets…

He didn't want to think about it…

"what…time is it…" It was as if he was slowly wakening…all seemed a bit more clear in his vision. He wasn't staring at the doctor though.

"it's dusk…I've been here the entire day…I haven't even lunched!" Leorio laughed, trying to lighten the atmosphere… But Killua's eyes had widened alarmed for a second. So he'd slept the entire day.

"I'm sorry…Leorio…" He was still facing his hands. An entire day he'd lost control. An entire day, and Gon? what about- but Leorio answered his thoughts.

"I called Kurapica… I told him you were having a weird flu with a horrific fever, and that we were at the infirmary. And then I just told him you needed to rest for the day here. He passed the news to Gon. They are both out into some kind of exploring"

"They're…together?"

"yep, that's what I got"

A feeling of double nature settled in his chest. Gon wasn't there… He'd never returned for breakfast. But he wasn't in danger either…somewhere relief had soothed his heartbeat. That prick probably was running behind something related to Gin. That selfish little bastard.

"Your cell phone's here and -" But Leorio suddenly realizd Killua had weakly lifted his hand to place it loosely over Leorio's wrist, over the bed.

He was not looking at him but at his lap…

"…thanks.." he barely whispered.

Leorio smiled tiredly... He observed the boy for a few moments before he finally murmured.

"For a moment you really had me worried"

The boy looked so young and pale, silver hair falling over his brow. Colour was coming back to his cheeks... The shade under his eyes had decreased... but certain hollowness on the violet eyes stared ahead, gaze lost. It made Leorio swallow with difficulty.

"Killua... I...took the liberty to patch you up" Leorio eyebrows furrowed. He noticed how Killua had tensed. And quite frankly he could understand, he'd be freaked out in his position, and so he added quickly "You should see your face! I only took your shirt off. " The elder laughed " I was hoping you'd tell me if you had any cuts or broken bones in your legs when you woke up"

Killua slowly shook his head.

"good" the doctor smiled.

There was a silence..

"Killu…. are you going to tell me...what the hell happened to you"
The boy remained silent. But he closed his eyes frowning as if a familiar headache had stung again his forehead. Leorio exhaled.

"Who... did this"

"No one"

"Killu... I...patched up the cuts on your back and front... I bandaged your broken wrist." he muttered feeling out of breath" and I stitched up that...cut at your hip." His voice had darkened "The one that cleanly reaches your bone."

That didn't include how he'd had to hydrate the boy as well as sedate him... The reason he'd passed out was because he'd had a major blood loss –Leorio had deduced from the gash.. and he'd still been at fast that morning. The gash itself was probably the origin of the fever...

Leorio remembered how he'd had to suppress himself at what he saw. After Killua fainted, he'd run to his unconscious body...

He'd been burning...

He'd taken him to the bed and softly pulled out his shirt...

He'd unconsciously held his breath. He tried to forget this was Killua. He tried to focus on the clinical aspect of it all... He examined his back...and he could see in detail the dark straight cut, the edges a bit swollen. Without nen treatment it would leave a scar...

Slowly he took the time to examine the multiple bruises, on different shades of purple and black that looked like fists. There was a visible huge bruise on his lower back, very dark and a bit swollen. Right beside where Killua himself had left a small wound were he could have sworn he'd seen the first time something like a word. His heart had shrunk by the minute, his mouth had gone dry. He'd been able to examine the deep long gash near the pale hip. Leorio had swallowed hard at this...

But maybe it unnerved him even more the cut on Killua's front. Images of wonder at how that got there intruded his mind...Persistent and troubled thoughts were the background music to his pacing at the infirmary all day long.

He applied nen to each of the wounds for a faster healing as he'd patched Killua up. How could he not ask? What should he do? He was in front someone who had been visibly injured by violence.

He could picture a fight of the sort. Sometimes as he thought, he came to the idea a torture scenario was closer to the evidence... but he couldn't imagine how. His family?

He should take into account this was not any boy. This was Killua.

None other than Zoldick heir...

None other but his friend...For the last years, part of the hunter family they'd created.

Now, as a Zoldick he'd killed and known torture since childhood..Why then... and maybe that was what worried him more...why then he seemed so vulnerable?

He'd never seen that expression on him before... fear, defeat...He looked up again.. and there it was... hollow eyes, staring lost...

Leorio suddenly stood up, and slowly he placed his hands on Killua's shoulders. Quite softly he
leaned him against the bed, so that he rested again. He felt his resistance on the tensing muscles. But
then the boy seemed to space out, just staring at the doctor above as he arranged the pillow
underneath and then brought to his mouth a glass of water

Details, sounds, Killua felt like standing in front of an edge... and the lightest hand could push him to
a dark dark place.. So he focused... Focus in the doctor' eyes, their colour... They were tired. There
was a concern wrinkle in between the elder's eyebrows . And somehow he looked older like that,
and not the juvenile dude he always was. He looked so much like a professional doctor...
The dark abyss just at the corner of his mind made him giggle at the thought, Leorio, he was proud
of Leorio. He giggled again
" I'm proud of you" He slurred a little

"uh?"

But the boy lifted a hand slowly to pat the doctor's hair in response. Leorio chuckled

"So the meds are kicking in finally!" he thanked the heavens.

"So you saying i'm...high" Killua closed his eyes. Leorio then decided he would take advantage of
the situation.

...

"Soooo say Killu, how old are they?"

The albino lifted an eyebrow serious.

"So you also play dirty Leorio... they all do...You filthy rat... You should know I can handle high"

Also? Ah, the wishful thinking had left unaccounted that Killua had probably been trained to hide
information in whatever state..

"Killu...who..." Leorio gently took one of his shoulders. Killua slowly took Leorio's hand away…
and somehow he giggled softly. He extended one arm weakly into the air

"Did you…know that..when lying on his … on his back while talking..Gon always traces patterns in
the air….as if he was drawing” he giggled again. "How stupid is that.."

"Killua.." he sighed. "Killu, I can't stay and do nothing. Please let me know who-"

"you won't get anywhere. I... won't tell you." His voice was tired and weak, but at least it wasn't as
hoarse…

"Killua stop! Don't you see yourse-"

"I see clearly" he whispered. " I scared you. Sorry…” Killua tilted his face"I ..just got beaten up" His
eyelids dropped. "I deserved it"

"beaten up? Killua, you could have passed out or died from the blood loss done with that gash to
your hip. This…is serious-"

"It only means that I need more training"

There was a heavy silence. "you don't mean that"
"I do".

"who did this?"

"leave it. It's nothing"

"This is not nothing. Killua, this morning you were a wreck"

"You don't get tired easily… But we had a... deal. No questions"

Leorio suddenly took his shoulders and wheeled him.

"Killua! Stop! Stop acting like nothing happened" Killua tensed frightened under the grasp.

. Leorio softened. It was hard to keep control. He was doing things the wrong way. He inhaled.

"Killua I can't stay and do nothing, you have to tell me who-"

"I can't" barely audible

"and I can't leave you like this-"

"I can't"

"and I won't let you-"

"my life goes on it"

"what?"

Killua stood silent.

It had run from his lips …. He'd almost said Gon's life, which was the truth but it was better this way... Maybe Leorio would get worried now, too worried to move.

Leorio stared in disbelief. He probably had heard wrong. Killua's expression was blank… but suddenly the albino rambled under his breath.

"I.. needed so much…so much to know no one else would know…" Killua curled to one side . A weak bitter giggle escaped him "But I couldn't think with the fever, it was terrible" his voice was drowsy " I think I cannot think with drugs that clearly either… All I know its that its better if this did not happen. It just didn't. Tomorrow…I'll act as such…Leorio"

"what-"

But seriousness imprinted the weight of his words " I have important reasons...But I understand I scared you. So I compromise that nothing else will happen to anyone. I can give you guarantee no... more attacks" That empty stare far off knowing it was a lie " You finding out.. you see, it was not planned... But I have it under control" The swift monotone fainter by the second... "But I have not lied. My life hangs in you...keeping the promise."

You could translate Gon for my life… His superego was in total absence under the circumstances, so he let the words echo in his thoughts …ah…he was so fucking tired.

"You were threatened?"
The boy slowly nodded, eyes closed.

"please..." *please don't ask...more...please...don't ask...why...*

"Killua I swear to you ... but... oh god" Leorio was at a loss of words, suddenly grasping the bigger picture. As if having received a cold shower. As if being burnt. He could visibly feel the barrier he could not cross around the boy. Someone had threatened Killua to silence. His life went with it.

"Can't I even tell Kurapica, to ask for help-"

"No" Killua's suddenly opened his eyes alarmed "Leorio-" But suddenly he was out of breath. He'd incorporated but it was as if all his body was made of cotton.

"Shh, lay back Killua...ok. I get it.."

Leorio was forming too many plausible explanations. It was sad that none of them were close...but you see, back then he hadn't had a way of knowing.... He'd only known- Now by heart- the injuries the kid sustained. Trying to decipher through them a tangled story, as if they were traces, signs that bore meaning, words he couldn't unlock. He only had the certainty that underneath his own doctor tie and shirt, his heart raced.

Leorio felt his mouth dry

"Killua.. I need to know if your.. hurt... anywhere else" .

"...I'm not" Killua said calmly.

"your legs..or"

"Leorio...I'm ok"

The doctor was looking into his eyes...and there was humbleness in the violet depth. It was so different to see this, such a change from the usual poker face...

"Killua...then...I'll take care of you...Kay?"

"I'll be fine on my own though...no more of this..."

"ok...you sleep now. You need it..."

Killua's eyes closed tired... His whole frame relaxed..

"Leorio I..."He inhaled..." I owe...you... a chocolate..." he mumbled as his eyes dropped..

Maybe it'd been a vendetta, Leorio tried to calm himself. He was a Zoldick after all...And probably Killua had more people on line to kill him than Justin Bieber had fans on a concert....

So maybe it had been something like a vendetta....and maybe Killua had let the person get away with it. Yeah, it could be like that. He'd willed himself to a vulnerable position possibly out of guilt, or more probably out of his characteristic sense of responsibility. And if that was the case then he, Leorio, should just let it all be...

Past being something so tricky and burdensome...
Chapter Notes

Thankyou so much for keeping up with me... Im so so sorry for taking this long I truly am. Thanks for all the messages. This story is long from due though. I just need to summon will to publish. You help a lot in that. Thankyou again

Music for this chapter: Gotta Figure it Out, by Erin Mccarley.

I want to thank Bushwah, my beta... She is the best. The world is blessed with her existence.

"Hey" Kurapica waved. He was sitting at the edge of a cliff, looking at the cloudy night closing on them when Gon appeared.

They'd left together to search the island early that morning driven –of course- by Gon. No. It'd been more like Gon had jumped in a boat almost with no hesitation and Kurapica in deep thought had trailed behind.

When they realized that they're work was taking longer and longer by the hour, they'd ended brunching together in the island under the treetops shade.

But they'd done so quite in silence, as if both had too much on their heads.

Only when they'd reached their humble berries dessert had Kurapica remembered his earlier telephone call. So he'd proceeded to inform Gon about Killua. And yes, only at this had the boy snapped out of his reverie.

"WOW."

"What?"

"I forgot- I forgot – I forgot- I was going to bring him breakfast and then…"

"then it seems Leorio took care of him so don't worry. Anyways it seems he has slept all day"

Gon looked troubled. But he seemed to find certain resolution, as he asked only a few more questions regarding the albino and hadn't commented any further. And he hadn't motioned to return, Kurapica noted. Which was great because like that he had an excuse to remain there, on his own private search. Then they'd spread out into the greenery, contacted only over phone.

Night now blanketed them.

Gon seemed just as entranced in his own thoughts as he'd been at lunch. Kurapica, without turning back, felt him walk slowly to his side, to plop beside him at the edge of the cliff, in silence.

"So" Kurapica began "I couldn't locate the rare breed of wolves you were seeking…. I called you
but at the end you weren't answering your cell phone anymore. I figured out you'd eventually appear on your own at the meeting point"

"Yeah…” Gon's feet dangled loosely.

"I did Killua's part of the assignment as you asked me to"

Gon answer came in delay. He seemed to shake other thoughts away before he turned his head
"Thank you, its tough work"

Kurapica hesitated…

"At a certain point my attention was occupied in trying to track a certain presence that accompanied us today…. It was rather perplexing, I don't know what to make out of it "

"...I sensed it"

"I thought you would."

" I don't know who it was" He looked at the Kuruta with his huge honey eyes.

"It wasn't Hisoka. He didn't leave his trademark" Kurapica said.

"Oh, I found it" Gon handed him a joker card.

"But maybe that one was intended for you" he pointed a finger, a friendly eyebrow lifted. Gon reexamined it as if it the plastic card had written the answer.

"There's a chance it might have been a spider" Kurapica let out indifferently "there was something familiar about it." The nonchalance hadn't worked 'cause Gon's immediately turned, beckoning.

"A spider? But that would mean…”

"Gon, it's a known fact they're after me…” He let out gently. "Maybe I haven't been careful enough."

"But what would you do if- would you be able to flee?"

" I came here willingly. I do know I said I would take a break on the subject" He eyed him "That does not mean I didn't take precautions"

There was this silence where Gon observed the determination in Kurapica's stance. And the elder felt half heartedly awkward and amused. He was waiting for the boy's next question. After all, he was going for his own cross-exam with the boy later.

The raven however, seemed to choose his words well. His young voice resounded in the dark with a crystal quality.

"Kurapica"

"Yes?"

"If you found them, would you fight them?"

Mmm...He let out a low sigh, and tried to answer truthfully
"It depends on the number. But I think that…yes"

An owl hooted faraway.

So he wasn't running this time.

Huge honey eyes studied him. Kurapica smiled knowingly "Well, I've calculated it is a strategic zone for a fight, it would be a regretful not to take advantage of it."

He'd turned his gaze to capture again the beautiful dark forest slides that ran towards the mountain peaks of that island. And catching the sparkle of curiosity in Gon's honey eyes, he couldn't help to lean a little. His voice lowered in confidence "They might be here…You know…Maybe I'm unconsciously chasing after them. I came here after all because the-

His phone vibrated in his pocket. He almost jumped out of his skin.

"Message" he excused.

He didn't check it.

Gon didn't know how to make him follow. He added shyly.

"Because?"

"Because…" But the Kuruta didn't proceed. "Just because..."

The prolonged silence and avoidant eyes informed Gon he should rest his eyes somewhere else. So huge honey irises landed over the star splotched sea.

The boy's openness did that to people, Kurapica had noticed. It made you lower your guard, made you at ease; it suddenly seemed pointless to lie. Unconsciously one couldn't help trusting him.

It was all the more dangerous. Not because he didn't trust him, but because information itself was something dangerous. Sometimes he understood perfectly why Killua was always content just tagging along. Gon interrupted his thoughts.

"If you fought them, would it be a to-kill fight?"

Seriousness imprinted the youngster's features. And for a fleeting second Kurapica felt he suddenly looked older.

"...Yes"

Gon stared at him in expectance.

Kurapica stood up and signaled something smoothly. Gon thought it was either 'let go' Or 'let's go', he couldn't be sure.

But he obediently followed as Kurapica spoke again. Switching topics.

"You might think I would be disappointed we didn't ascertain anything about that presence. It could seem quite a futile use of time. However, I actually I discovered, as a good hunter must, what can bring us back to the ship, now that its the middle of the night"

He smiled and whistled.
A beautiful huge bird appeared, right where the dark lonely trees cut the silhouette of the island at their backs.

Gon immediately identified it as a female nightingale, despite its unusual color. It was black with large white spots…or white with large black spots, pick your like. It slowly floated as if suspended, high above, before landing gracefully some meters away from them, arching smoothly and folding its wings. Curling as it was now, hiding its legs, it was thrice their size.

"Turns out reading those HxH guides' on the ship came out pretty handy. I'm properly informed these birds are very friendly"”

Gon though hadn't waited for any approval to approach the feathered creature.

It stared back with beautiful huge eyes. Gon lifted one of his tawny arms and caressed its soft feathers.

"Hey" The nightingale closed her eyes snuggling her enormous head against his palm, as she emitted a hooting, almost purring sound.

"I'm calling her 'cow!'" Gon chirped.

Kurapica half smiled, and couldn't help the instinctive checking-out of his surroundings. Just making sure Hisoka wasn't there to snatch cuteness embodied.

He sighed "It turns out that if you feed her with dead mice, she'll let you ride her. It seems someone had already tamed her before us" the Kuruta conveyed a meaningful smile.

But Gon didn't follow the train of thought intended as he gazed up at Kurapica.

"Have you talked to…err… Leorio again?" Kurapica could tell he was trying to disguise his interest. It was unusual for Gon.

"Yeah" Kurapica exhaled. "Killua's fine...now" he swiftly answered the implied question. "But it seems this morning Leorio withheld to us how bad he was. He did look pretty unwell, no?"

Gon's expression remained fixed on Cow's feathers as he nodded slowly.

Kurapica exhaled "Before you arrived I called him. I understand that only now that he has all under control Leorio decided to tell me how bad it was. Killua ran a dangerously high fever...and is really sick"

"He said that?" alarm set alight Gon's eyes.

"Yes."

"Is he alright?"

" Don't worry …it was risky at the moment but now all is fine"

"but he'll be alright?"

"yes.. Leorio will force him to rest all that's necessary"

"oh"

"He seems to have caught some unknown flu…weird uh? Who would have guessed the dude wasn't
immune to all... well you would know that no?" Kurapica laughed. But Gon had remained quiet. The Kuruta examined him briefly, before returning to pack his own stuff.

"So Gon, what did you do yesterday?" He inquired casually.

The boy didn't answer.

"Gon"

"Uh?"

"I was asking you what you had done yesterday"

"Oh! Right!" he scratched his nape remembering "yesterday...oh, what I told you guys. We ate chocolate. At Pandora's" Somehow the memories lightened the gloomy expression from before.

"You were together all the time?" Because eating chocolate did not account for those bruises after all.

"Yeah! wait no. At a moment our shop was robbed and Killua went chasing after the thieves. He taught them a lesson alright! That's how we got a car" He added with enthusiasm.

"So thieves uh? and how many were-wait what? You drove a car? And where did you leave it?"

"Parked at an abandoned house by the beach of Pandora. I told Killua we were stealing it. He told me it was already stolen so it didn't count. And I told him that they'd steal it again if abandoned. But he kept the keys anyways" he paused "I think he likes having a trophy of his victims" Gon laughed.

Kurapica paled. "He killed them?"

"No" Gon said bothered. "He kicked their sorry butts, that's all...and kept the car keys"

"Oh... well, you never know... "and how many were there?"

"mmm Four of them."

"Nen users?"

"No. why? They were just your common burglar I think..." He paused and suddenly looked up "Kurapica, I think he got sick because we swam till late before and after we arrived to the ship, and it rained but we didn't change clothes and... that's what Mitosan used to tell me in winters- it is my fault"

Was that guilt? Kurapica stifled his laughter.

"Do you feel sick?"

"I'm fine I think"

"Then maybe it was something else. But take care anyways; if it did that to Killua, I can only fathom what's left for the rest of us"

Kurapica was standing now beside Gon, carrying a bag. The huge nightingale opened her eyes, as if smelling its contents. Kurapica answered waving in front of her one dead mouse. Gon thought it was unusual for that type of bird to eat mice, but then he reminded himself it was already unusual her size and colour. Maybe she had some owlish heritage.
"Such a beautiful creature" the kuruta muttered under his breath slowly. Inadvertently echoing his thoughts. Kurapica's expression was unexpectedly peaceful …All his features had softened as if for a moment he'd made a truce with the world.

The blond would have agreed. Even though the spiders could be near and he had to resolve a little Zoldick mystery.

There was a silence, only filled by the sound of chewing and small cracking bone snaps as the bird ate... Meanwhile, Gon arranged his own stuff in a bundle in silence.

"So you found them" Kurapica cast him a side glance.

Gon looked up with honest surprise on his brow.

"How did you know?"

His friend gave a low chuckle at this.

"Well, you just confirmed it" So naïve..." So, tell me how was it"

But Gon looked troubled.

"I…don't know. I guess it was great…” But he didn't elaborate further. He just climbed over the nightingale which had leaned, ready to take flight passengers or not. Kurapica climbed behind.

And for the short journey to the ship, the youngster was quiet…

Kurapica knew Gon well and so he cast away his worries. The boy would probably share aloud his concerns tomorrow. He had to admit he had a similar way of processing things when something was bothering him. He just didn't talk openly about problems after he'd munched them up. It was probably due to different personalities, or past, or age who knows. He would never get used to relying on friendship as much as Gon did, but he was learning.

Gon stared.

And stared.

And stared.

As they flew through the night, nope, he couldn't shake it off. The feeling he was supposed to be experiencing was the light weight, the thrill of flying. Or even more…that feeling of a conqueror, achieving the treasure, the El Dorado, he'd found it. He dashed over the black mirror of the seas and Gon thought it should be wonderful. But he didn't. And he was flying.

Like on greed island.

With accompany card.

He thought of his day. After hours of exploring and finding more wolves nests and hide-outs than he ever wished to see again, he'd finally found a hidden cave of different trails to the rest. It belonged to a pack of wolves of singular paws. Nothing too extraordinary though. It was a matter of following their track- though it proved quite difficult for such a misleading small sign.

And running through the forests and-

Bam! the big fall.
He was sliding through what appeared to be a trap. And he'd landed into a second forest floor, a hideout.

And there they were: Beings and beings of all sizes with black fur and wolverine appearance; but with two heads on one body.

It was unbelievable.

Gon thought he would explode like a balloon. Out of awe and fear. He was thrilled. He was beyond thrilled. It paralyzed in a rush all his muscles. He could hear his heart beat on his ears, ringing from the fall.

The accomplishment was augmented by the fact that the wolves weren't attacking him at all in their silent staring. Even though he was on their territory. Actually, a youngling of the wolf-pack had approached him, smelling him warily before throwing him of his feet with full force and licking him with two heads.

It was disturbing and wonderful if something like that fit ever inside somebody's chest.

He felt like rediscovering again something so unknown- he'd been trying again and again to sink into his head the idea that this was something his own father had discovered. Somehow the own hunt that had lead him there brought him closer to the idea of Gin and his own goals. He realized he'd wanted to celebrate. He'd wanted to scream, to hooray out loud and high five-

Right.

It's not like he hadn't done that before. They'd done it a thousand times, walk on their own according to certain goal, it was fine. They didn't have to do all together and sometimes Gon liked it that way… especially when it came to Gin. That was something that, well, was his own.

Now he'd made a huge discovery on the field of his private search.

And it was odd.

Yes, yes yes. He found himself able to predict what the albino would have said, the captious look he would have given, the dangerous smirk that would have pushed him, Gon, to find the pack of wolves even sooner.

It wasn't right. He'd thought he'd been in the wrong place that morning and so he'd gone ahead and found what he was meant to.

He was still misplaced.

The flight was over.

"Have a well deserved rest Gon" His voice was low and gentle as they saw the bird disappear at the horizon.

"Kurapica-" Gon began wondering but was cut.

"No. We'll see the guys in the morning"

"But…"

" It's too late to wake them up… it's really late"
"...ok" he'd forgotten the time...

"We'll see them tomorrow"

"Yeah" Gon smiled.

"Sleep well" The blond patted Gon's shoulder

"You too!"

As Gon walked the lonely halls of the deck he heard the silent murmur of the sea and he still felt an ache.

Was it because he wanted to find his father, but the goal seemed always to slip away and away? Well it did irk, it itched and bothered, the weight of the unmet defiance was that it? Or was it because maybe it was okay that things kept that way as long as...

He'd entered their room. It was empty.

He'd left his stuff there and had directed towards the infirmary. Locating it was easy with the aid of an old and dear technique: Leorio's aftershave.

---

The infirmary. The words glowed in the dark. Everyone was gone except for the petite secretary who led Gon to Leorio's room.

The doctor had passed out in one of the examining couches. Evidently tired.

The secretary informed him that in one of the adjacent rooms slept the albino. Then she'd leaned on one of her heels, with a morbid glow under squared glasses and whispered "by the way, is it true that he's a... well you know, a Zoldick?"

Gon now stared at the white door in expectance. He finally turned the doorknob.

It swung open. He slid inside.

It was all dark. The moonlight entered through one of the windows. And there in the middle was a cold-looking metal hospital bed, with Killua inside. A stitch pulled inside his chest. He closed the door behind him.

The silver haired boy was lying on one of his sides, fast asleep.... His arms over the blanket, his head hidden in the bend of his elbow. His hair falling smoothly over his forehead.

Gon approached and realized the boy was connected to an IV. And his wrist was in a cast.

He hadn't been there that day... he hadn't appeared again at all after he left. Why he had cast?

Gon walked towards the bed vacillating.

And silently he crept over to the space Killua left at his back.

Not to disturb him, as quietly as he could he slid his feet under the thin bed clothing.

He lied there, just centimeters away from Killua, staring at his neck ...Gon's feet meanwhile fondled with the sheets, something he always did when he thought.

His right toes would draw circles on his left foot. And then the other way round. And the sheets
would slightly tangle and untangle.

He sucked in air.

And in an impulse he moved closer. To embrace the sleeping boy…

He held his breath. Holding him inside his arms.

He felt Killua stiffen at the touch. Gon’s heart was racing without letting go. And then the raven was startled. Killua had…mewled.

"…no…"

It might have not existed, so soft a thread of a voice as if pronounced under a heavy fog of deep sleep. The pale hand drowsily moved to hold on one of Gon's wrist. Gon held his breath. Frozen and weirdly thinking of cats. He was hidden in Killua's neck paralyzed.

But seconds and minutes crept. And gradually he felt the albino loosening up inside his arms. He had not woken up...

Gon sighed... Liking and fearing the roller coaster at the pit of his stomach at something he'd never done before. And shyly, he nestled into Killua's neck, to breathe in his scent… He liked that scent a lot… He felt it invading his throat and lungs..

He'd guessed right. It did make him feel better…

And he grinned in the feeling of surmount mischief. The strands of silver hair tickled Gon's cheeks as he breathed in again….his warmth…

He wished he didn't want this as much.

Things definitely would be easier had he learned to give up sooner. Definitely.

Ah!

He woke up with a start again. He was getting used to it.

The jagged dark images diffused as soon as he realized there were the faintest ray lights right across the room. It was still too dark. Too early. He closed his eyes again. But the jagged collection revisited. The challenge was to open his lids despite the drunken heaviness of the drugs.

But he did open his eyes again and turned inside the bed, summoning strength from the fact he'd been laying like that for too long.

And there. Right beside him, drooling over the entire pillow, was him. Why was he here who knows. Since when who knows too…

The sun fell on the tanned skin of his waist, and arms. Those arms that held fishing rods and cleaned off dead fish with such skill…All else, the last days…That night…with a little work it could seem unreal. Made of a different texture to the cozy warmth of his chest rising and falling so soundly…

It made him close his eyes and drift closer, to some place warmer, safer than the dark edges and your usual nightmare…He dreamed strangely of Gon's childhood. Being raised in sun rising woods, rays of lights through shades of green.
"Here they are!" Gon entered with two Styrofoam cups and put them in the table. It was midmorning. "So… why the hot water?"

Killua smiled. The boy finally reappeared. He didn't know what to do on his own with so much white all around-the walls, the sheet, and the cast. Staring at the ceiling wasn't a safer place either. It still haunted him, yes.

Gon in front

"You'll see" he tilted his smile.

The raven, curious, settled the cups in the dismountable table, now placed in front of Killua's bed. The boy looked way better than yesterday. Still pale though. But Gon guessed that could only be fixed with some things Biscuit once had told him were called auto bronzers.

Killua placed his hands around one of the cups. He left them there, a look of concentration settling under white silver bangs. It looked funny, because he had a cast while doing so. Gon observed the procedure and was puzzled when he realized it consisted only in… that. Hands around Styrofoam cups.

"Uh?"

"…you're kidding? Use gyo"

"Oh! Right!" He remembered.

-Now he felt stupid.

Killua's aura was pouring smoothly from his hands to the cup as alchemy swirled inside. In a minute he held in between them a nice hot chocolate.

"Whoa, you're turning good" Gon had breathed. He couldn't help it, he'd poked Killua and muttered solemnly. "Beverage machine"

"Don't say it like that" Killua snapped. And sighing he cleared his throat, trying to be civil again "so anyways, what do you want?"

"Mmm I'll go with tea"

"Piece of cake"

In seconds he had in between his hands a hot honey colored tea.

"Thank you!" Gon took the cup and immediately sipped curiously, as Killua raised a warning hand

"Wait! It's ho-"

"Tongue burn!"

"…"Cause you know, some things never change.

Killua leaned back on the bed, suddenly feeling tired. He gave a discreet glance of distrust at the IV.

"Oh, it's stupid sweet too" Gon noticed.

"Then you do it "he growled.
"Why would I?" Gon protested.

"Then you like it"

"I like sweet"

Killua rested his back against the pillows. He hated being tired. Something he should not be since he'd been in a bed for at least thirty hours or so. The whole situation, where things were slightly not under control just irritated him. He was refraining from biting everyone's head off. He wanted to be out of this infirmary as soon as possible. Out out out. He wanted out…

His gaze stumbled into the bag Gon had brought.

"What's in it?" Killua pointed smoothly with a questioning eyebrow.

Gon always liked that swift arching gesture he made. He raised the bag to Killua.

"I went to go get something for you"

"Ha, knew it. You took too long. It was either that or you flirting with the secretary "he smirked mischievously. The guy had taken long.

"Yeah! Wait, what?"

Killua laughed "The secretary! You didn't run into her? She came in here, arranging her make up while wondering aloud from where you came from and asking all this very-sexy-questions"

Gon was startled.

"What's a sexy question?" He seemed lost as to the topic of the conversation in general.

"Oh you know. The kind she went asking all casually " soooo what's his deal?" and "is he single" sort" the albino giggled.

At the moment he'd almost killed the lady. And had feigned fulminant narcolepsy too shoo her away.

Gon suddenly looked amused.

"Really? She asked those things about me?" Was that a smug smile?

"Like to hear it, uh?" Killua examined his friend with curiosity.

"No it's just" and Gon's smile had widened even more as a tiny giggle interrupted his speech. To the albino's irritation. "Ok. You see, that's weird because" -giggle- "because before you woke up she was also into the –how you call it? Sexy questions. But then it was about you" he pointed out. And oh, he drank the expression in Killua's face.

…

"Oh its a joke."

"Nope. She did. While fluttering her lashes and asking how old you were, and if you had a girlfriend " Gon, précised, grinning slightly at the remembrance.

They looked at each other disturbed.
Really disturbed.

And they burst out in laughter. The mutual expression of disbelief set each other into laughing hard all over again, one that- interrupted in giggles- read something along the lines of why us, from all the guys, the ones that shower like once a week and eat puffed cheese snacks until an orange pasta covers their entire cheeks or chase each other with disgustbugs.

When some high heeled shoes passed by their door, they tried to shush themselves, but it actually worked like throwing a firecracker between them because maybe it was the said secretary. And when Gon started snorting it was even worse.

It slowly died down as Killua, stifling his giggles, realized he was hungry for the first time in a lapse of some 37 hours that he hadn't eaten.

Sometime in between the foggy drug induced stupor he actually remembered regretting not having drank that hot chocolate Kurapica had offered that night.

"Give me the bag" said the boy with catlike grin. Gon emptied it in Killua's lap, and observed intently his friend's reaction. Violet eyes had widened slightly and you could again say boys will be boys.

"Candies! My game boy! My yoyos!" his voice sparkled at the object selection

"I thought you could use some training in the tedious nursery evenings"

"Training? Oh no, this will help me pass the time until Leorio unleashes me, but I'm leaving as soon as possible which is to-day. "

"You can?"

"Why not?"

"Yesterday you were dying"

"I wasn't, for god's sake, you've never seen me truly-" He stumbled with Gon's honey eyes, looking deep into his own… "What happened to you?"

For a second he'd actually believed the question hadn't been verbalized. But that somehow it had been whispered out of the honey staring depth.

"Uh?"

"Dude, you have a cast"

Right.

Mmmm….

He felt his silver tongue smoothing out the wrinkles.

"The reason is a beeaautiful mystery. My wrist is fine, so I believe the solution lies within Leorio's small head"

"He said your wrist was broken"
"He must have said sprained Gon"

"no-

"Yes. At least that was the excuse he said to me to punish me"

"Punish you?"

"Yes, to give field to a heartless payback of years calling him for what he is: a senior." He said in a rush of inspiration. He leaned tired but went on "He has the power to put casts? He goes and puts me one because I didn't take care well enough and fell sick- and the 'you don't know how to take care of yourself Killua' crap" he mimicked annoyed "I would surely be able to move my arm freely if he hadn't such a short temper! But I'm taking it out today 'cause I don't have nothing- nothing but a faded scuba diving bruise." He wrinkled his nose at the cast " It itches, I can't stand it! But -oooooh you brought the ones in the cheesecake fudge box" he pointed and rejoiced, acting as if he had the attention span of a bird.

What a lousy story. But Gon had apparently bought it, as he'd tilted his head smiling. But Killua stopped abruptly the motion of picking one of the many chocolates in front.

"There are three missing" he stated. He looked directly at Gon.

"I..Err.."

"There were ten in this particular flavor box, no?" He tilted his head. "you... ate them?" He asked first genuinely curious. But then devious eyes narrowed ever slightly

"No.. I.."

"Wow, you did eat them uh?" Smooth words coexisting with the dangerous violet glint. His hand extended towards Gon, inviting him to spit the explanation. .

This was bad. Gon gaped because he wasn't such a good excuse builder as his friend.

" Too bad they were my new favorite" the albino had continued. And behind his smile, murderous energy almost fizzed his hair as he smirked "So little Gon, you ate them uh?" He was about to launch onto Gon's neck when suddenly he noticed the word choice of what he himself had said and froze. Just as Gon cried.

"NO! I didn't eat them! I gave them to the secretary!"

"Uh?"

He'd been totally taken by surprise, Gon could tell.

"I gave them to the secretary" he squeaked.

"Oh! So you.. Oh" Killua said lost "so you oh.. Eh, so you were really flirting?" His tone of voice wavered from the statement to the question, taking a second longer than usual to resume his nonchalance. Gon fidgeted. And the next was what he thought aloud and heard in delay without biting his tongue in time:

"Would you mind if I had been flirting with the secretary?"

Killua had paled a little before smiling " 'Course not! So you where! You dog" he pushed him on the shoulder in a friendly gesture. Maybe with a little more force than necessary "I would give you my
"Killua-tips on how to hit on girls"

"You're good at that?"

"If I'm onto it, oh yes." he actually was... "But you also know your way with dating, no?"

Gon almost interrupted him as he blurted

"Then I bet you!"

"Uh?"

"I bet you! Wins whoever hits on a girl best" Gon extended his hand, determination on his eyes.

Killua recognized Gon was drawing the subject to a known field: competition. He wasn't liking it at all. Not the competition part -because Gon was always fun to mess around…. But...

No...
He knew his reality. His, theirs. Resolution settled coldly on his chest.

"Deal" he said smoothly

"Deal!" Gon sealed determined

"Deal it is" Killua replied, not letting Gon's stare go.

"yes, deal it is!" Gon said under clenched teeth.

Silence. Gon broke it

"Uh-uh. So it's a…"

"Deal"

It was an awkward and intense moment, were both were caught in a glaring contest. Killua was the first to break it. Suddenly he couldn't look directly at those eyes again.

"Anyways, you should take into account you began earlier " Killua commented easily.

"Uh? Oh the chocolates. No.. I…lied. I ate them"

"You lied?"

"Yup, so you wouldn't kill me"

Killua heart eased one beat.

"You didn't give them to the- ha ha" he suddenly laughed " You Ate Them" devious intent pulling up the corner of his mouth.

"I-I but, it's just they were there and-"

"Those were my new favorite" The albino had said calmly, examining Gon as if a prey "and it was the only cheesecake fudge chocolate box"

Gon's skin hair rose in anticipation out of instinct but it was too late, Killua, cast and all had launched at his neck and toppled him in the bed attempting a headlock, with such ability he barely disturbed
the bed sheets. But Gon, just as swift, stopped him with a knee so he finally settled with just choking him on all fours as Gon intensely wriggled and fought back and laughed.

"This will do for today's training" the albino announced. He actually spoke the truth because all his limbs felt like cotton wool. Otherwise he would have already mastered the arm-lock he'd been aiming for, when stopped by Gon's knee.

"aaaah! not faaaair!"

He fought but Killua pinned his hands with his own knees. Gon wailed out of breath and kicked. And one of his legs jerked the table. Which, lever like launched the cup of hot hot tea against them. Killua, without looking, smoothly evaded the projectile without even processing what it was. The cup flew an inch away from his ear to land nicely upside down on Gon's chest.

Spilling all its content.

The scream made echoes.

"AAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAA" Gon's face contorted in a grimace of pain. The water had been so hot it was steaming from his shirt.

FUCK! Killua panicked "I'm Sorry ! I'm sorry Gon! I'm sorry!" Water boiled at how many degrees? what should he do?

"HOT HOT HOT, IT BURNS!"

"What do I do! -" Gon was writhing underneath desperate and in pain clawing his neck "Oh right!"Killua took the bed clothing and began drying Gon's shirt

"NOT AGAINST MY SKIN!" Gon snapped Killua's hand aside and tried ripping the front of his shirt in two. Killua stared.

"Help me you idiot !OW OW OW!"

"Right!"

He helped, desperately trying not to linger on the image of the boy underneath. He felt the familiar unease on the pitch of his stomach.

But then the door swung open.

"No, I don't think it's anything. I mean, they're always fighting-" Kurapica had entered talking to someone at his back when he turned and froze on the spot. Having caught indeed one unusual image for a fleeting second.

Killua was on all fours over Gon, hands near his waist. This one was underneath, naked from the waist up writhing, tears on his eyes. Strips of what appeared to had been once his shirt lied in disarray at his sides, hiding one of killua's hands. Because the other one lied at ease in Gon's neck.

Kurapica blushed just as Leorio and the nurse entered the room.

They all gaped.

Killua jumped as if burned lifting his arms

"This is definitely not what it looks like" He said eyes wide and frozen. A horrible feeling suddenly
invaded him chest up. "Definitely-not!"

Everyone stared in disbelief.

"But it is!" Gon incorporated as all stares fell now upon him. He pointed accusingly at the albino "He burned me! It hurts! Just because I ate his chocolates-he"

Everyone noticed the spilt Styrofoam cup, the scattered chocolates, and began laughing. Killua was now blushing severely, the farthest he could be from the raven.

"I told you they were always fighting" Kurapica explained to the petite nurse that adjusted her glasses as she giggled covering her mouth, her cheeks also slightly tinged.

"I-err.. We were fighting and I was aiming for a headlock and the cup was lying on the table and we accidentally spilled it and-"

Leorio laughed madly "and then what did it look like Killua uh?" the doctor nudged him

Killua growled. "Fuck off"

But this one just continued to laugh more as he checked Gon's chest. He immediately applied nen as he spoke "This and some ice right after the burn will stop the skin from blistering" He might use nen but he wasn't god. Else the ice wouldn't be necessary. And Killua wouldn't be up. Despite the horse-killing drugs.

"Could you bring us some ice nurse?" Gon begged, now sitting still, grimacing at the reddening skin on his chest.

"Sure honey! I'm Ellen! Oh, but what am I saying- for you its Ellie-chan! I'm going right away." She bit her lip and hurried of the room excited.

"For you it's Ellie-chan!" Leorio mimicked as he helped out Gon, while Kurapica laughed.

"But how old is she? Like twenty four?"Obviously an age he thought was hiper mega old, it seems.

"Anyways, you shouldn't be out of bed Killua" Leorio scolded gently

"What? No way, for how long am I supposed to stay here?"

"One more night at least. And then restricted movement"

He turned to give a warning look. Because don't forget it Killua-his eyes reprimanded- you fainted out of blood loss, You've got eight stitches on your side, I don't want them opening, nen alone won't do unless you focus on recovery and all the crap he'd been lectured on yesterday.

Killua sighed, hands massaging his temples. His first impulse was leaving all the shit behind as soon as possible. But he couldn't act rash.

… The problem was he had gotten used to rely on his control over petty impulses on the past. Now it felt as if stepping on thin air, he couldn't but feel the constant need to get out out out, irksome itch that would soon mess up with his breathing if he didn't act.

He raised his head. Ah, he felt tired…

"Look, I'll be careful." He said sincerely "Buuuut I'm out of here" he added with sergeant-hand to his forehead. He encountered protests but he continued to ready himself.
"ah come on!" Leorio raised his hands. But the boy was shoving all inside the bag again.

"Killua"

"I'm sorry! But I'm not staying here doing nothing". He looked at the IV that followed him everywhere, doubting

"No Killua. You're not." And his voice was now hard through stern eyes "you're staying"

"Killua you should-" Gon interrupted as Kurapica in the background wore a raised eyebrow.

"no no no, guys, you did this yesterday, you're not doing it again" he felt his patience and inch away from bursting the seams out of civility.

"Killua" Leorio took his shoulder. Something he always disliked. And which the doctor did a lot to his misfortune. He guessed the gesture conferred him more authority. Control. He wrinkled his nose but did not move. He was the one that needed to control himself. He couldn't avoid the stare and realized ugh, he'd spaced out for two seconds.

"Listen to me" The elder murmured. His eyes read the 'I'm not letting you out if your life is threatened'. The doctor had then paused, to imprint the warning in the low cadence of his voice…

"We have a deal Killua. Remember"

…

The boy stared back unreadable. Poker dead eyes. A deal.

Just then nurse entered. "I brought it!" She waved, two dimples in her smile.

She was rooted to the spot. Cold eyes shot her daggers in one of the most murderous stares she'd ever seen.

Her eyes widened and she lifted her arms "I-I'll just leave it o-over here"

Only then he realized he'd stared. But she had already propped the ice by the table and had swiftly left, closing the door in a hurry, her heels echoing round the hall.

Killua muttered some unholy words under his breath as he walked past Leorio. He'd been about to kill someone, yes, and maybe Gon new. He knew him so well it was sometimes inconvenient.

"Killua!" Leorio yelled. The albino had opened the door as he also heard the faint 'killu' of Gon's voice on the background.

"Ok then" Leorio rose at his back. "then I will te -"

Killua turned smoothly and pointed his fingers like a gun

"we need to talk" he winked.

Totally unsettling Leorio.

"But first I'm going to take a shower"

"But the sti-"
"…Thanks for coming. And for taking care of me." Thumbs up. And he close the door.

He truly meant it. Despite behaving like a jerk, he truly meant it.

They were left with the IV hanging from its hook.

"When…?" Kurapica asked but Gon ran past him
"Killua open up!" Gon fist the door to their room for the eleventh time.

But this time it opened just as his hand was going to land again against the painted wood. He crossed over and fell almightily inside.

The albino in new clothes stared at the figure on the floor. Silver drops glistened on the wet strands of hair.

"Hey" he smiled down

"You locked me outside!" The raven stood up.

"I did? The door must have some defect on the mechanism."

Gon scanned Killua who looked fresh and ready to hike.

"You took your cast! You rebel! Let me see" Gon snatched the albino's arm. Killua sighed, pretending it wasn't painful. Along with pretending he wasn't the liar he was.

"I figured casts and showers would be strange bedfellows, and since I'm not giving up the last one…"

"It's bruised" Gon looked at him. "You had this from before but… Do you think that maybe you worsened it with the thieves' capture?"

Killua stayed quiet some seconds amused. "Brilliant"

"uh?"

"That's what happened Gon. I punched the ceiling of our car. You know, the one I gave you driving lessons with. And I didn't use nen to protect myself. So that's probably why, there you go" He took his arm away satisfied.

"why didn't you protect it?" he said with a 'doh' tone. It sounded quite 'doh' at their level...
"...got distracted"

"like that happens" he glanced skeptically at his friend as he picked one or two things of the room.

"It does when I'm having fun, it's not a real battle and there are chocolates involved" Killua adjusted his bag at his back.

"True" Gon conceded.

Killua followed him outside. Even though he was a natural, he disliked lying. Someone just getting to know him wouldn't believe he only did it when strictly necessary; But he did, even though it came as a language so fluent... In stressful moments that tended to happen a lot.

Fishing nets hanged from their shoulders because they would hunt some fish for their lunch that didn't fell for fishing rods at all.

Killua gave a casual sideglance to him... Gon was running his hand over the arch of the fishing rod, checking with knowing handsome eyes, readying it just in case.

The albino sighed. He didn't know how to pose the subject to his friend. He'd rehearsed it in his mind over and over; so much the words had begun to grow echoes in his mind like chanting to an old tape recorder… One that would rewind and replay with renewed urgency over and over…Gon…

I need to leave… we need to leave... can we return to this cruise in another season? Cause I need to leave, Let's go to a far off land where no one can find us, let's go to explore the Tibetans mountainsides or the ice fields of Antarctica, let's get lost on a Peruvian jungle or maybe back to whale island, somehow, somewhere, someplace there isn't danger, where no one recognize us... but ourselves... let's try this adventure, please let us leave...

Words, words, and words he wouldn't use. He had to begin with the unrolling his tongue part.

"Hey" Killua began…"Gon… I…"

"yup?"

Stage fright.

"...sooo how long were you out there knocking at the door?"

"Long enough to think of a plan" the raven said eagerly suddenly turning around.

"A plan?" …in what had the boy gotten into now…

"Oh right! I have to update you… Ok. You like adventures no?"


...The lady outside was done vacuuming the entrance of the cafeteria.

"The spiders?" Killua gaped across the table.

But Gon's eyes weren't lying. Not that he was too good at doing that anyways.

"I didn't tell Kurapica" the raven looked down for a moment. But then he returned his unwavering
"And you can't tell him"

"But he's the one they're after!" He almost spilt Gon's orange juice. Realizing for the third time he'd taken the wrong cup again. Killua closed his eyes.

"Wait, I know" the albino sighed "This is where you tell me one of your stupid ideas"

And by stupid he meant epic and lost-cause.

"I knew you'd listen" Gon whispered relieved.

"yeah, yeah, now surprise me"

The raven hesitated "I actually didn't see them"

"them"

"two or three. Kurapica's path was crossed by one. He told me so. I sensed more" Seriousness imprinted his features.

And for a grave moment both realized Gon had been at the edge of meeting The Spiders outnumbered. Killua's eyes had darkened.

Gon drank his juice from the glass messily and cleaned with his mouth with his sleeve as he added "Kurapica didn't recognize the identity of the one tracking him. But then I thought that's because he's only been in the presence of some spiders. The only moment he got to cross with them was at the hotel, when we were captured"

"I remember well. I broke Paku's arm…" Killua mused. "And Kurapica was wearing a wig, looking like a girl". Good old times.

"Yeah" Gon smiled. "Well, the auras I felt back at the woods, I sensed they belonged to guys from the spider… I knew them. But I couldn't tell who"

Killua played with the straw.

"…You are you sure it's them… That you know these auras from York shin, not from anywhere else"

"Yes"

"You're a hundred percent sure"

"Yes I am. I knew them. I'd met that energy before."

Killua remained quiet.

"With whom could I be mistaking them if not?" Gon placed his elbows on the table, trying to follow.

Killua suddenly realized he'd been brooding. He laughed, his finger tracing the rim of his glass "It could be anyone. Don't take me seriously. I was just making sure... you know... they could be some Zoldicks for a change" he said shrugging. "You said you knew these auras from before, they're also killers-"

"it wasn't them." Gon was categorical. And maybe it was his own misperception, the albino thought, but he'd sensed a trace of anger on the last word. The silence gave a depth of seriousness to his
youthful features.

"…Is there a reason why it could have been them anyways?"

Killua paused, laughing mentally at his own paranoia.

"No. none at all."

"You sure?"

"Yeah! I mean, I guess… seeing Brother the other day alarmed me" he murmured. Suddenly sincere.

Gon remained silent a few seconds. Before he lowered his gaze. "Killua" his voice had lowered as well. "He said that if he found them again, it would be a to-kill fight"

The albino remained silent. He could hear the silken low voice of the Kuruta back at York shin. When he told them his secret. The conditions.

"I don't care what he has done in the past… But I don't want him to kill again… I don't want Kurapica to carry that burden. Nor I want him injured or… dead" And there was certain urgency on his tone.

Killua nodded. He understood

"So you've got a plan. That doesn't involve him"

Gon remained quiet…

"But…" the raveb finally hesitated, troubled.

Killua paused "But you know it's his choice, don't you?" he tilted his smile "We are always complaining they meddle too much with our affairs. This is the same" he said gently.

"Yes…"and his eyebrows tilted in sadness "That's why I think I'm evil …'cause I think I'm not going to stop" There was guilt in his expression... and resolution. " I...can't let him" that determination, old as himself.

… Killua sighed…
So much for telling Gon… The world hated him. It had acceptable reasons though…
He rested his chin in one hand

"Neh. That's called payback"

"Payback?" Gon repeated.

"Yeah. They take care of us, we take care of them"

"Payback…" the boy trailed.

"Yup" He looked at Gon intently as this one battled his own demons.

"and so it's not that bad?" the raven asked.

"what? It's awful" he said unblinkingly.

"oh"
"and so you've got a plan" The albino said resting now both his elbows on the table.

"uh-uh"

"I'm in"

Gon smiled faintly.

Since then the doctor was at edge. Every single day he kept cursing under his breath.

He was now walking up the hallways that led to the stairs that led to the top floor of the fancy cruise. There was the swimming pool…

He climbed. Mirrors at the side gave him back the image of daddy long legs with a frown, as he flew over the red carpeted flights.

He'd encountered a glass door. It reflected his furrowed brow.

From it hang a sign that read

"DO NOT ENTER. UNDER MAINTAINANCE".

He hesitated.

He checked the doorknob.

It was open…

He finally entered as he'd been instructed.

The night breeze welcomed him. The usual lights were turned off but the pool was lit from within.

In its middle, floating face down was the boy, as if holding his breath. Or playing dead.

The door closed at Leorio's back, and at its sound, the albino emerged from the depth of who knows what thought.

He noted how the long blue wet shirt highlighted his violet eyes even from the distance as the albino looked around floating. He took a moment to catch his bearings, being face down as he'd been, before spotting Leorio at the door. He disappeared under the water to reappear at the edge with a smile.

That daredevil brat had evaded him for two days, even though he'd said they would talk. But when he'd been about to snap, he'd received a cell phone message with a time, the pool and a smiley.

"You came early" a wet Killua climbed out. He was barefoot, dripping all over as he just flopped gracefully on the floor in front of him, crossing his legs. Leorio didn't bother to nod, looking quiet unfriendly.

"Gon's sending correspondence to Mito-san…” The boy began unsure. Leorio sat in the chair in front, sighing.

"Can you go into the pool in clothes?"

"There's no one here to tell me otherwise" He shrugged.
Leorio scanned him toes to head. He was dripping all over, white bangs glistening under the pools lights.

"You made the sign of 'pool under maintenance' didn't you" More and more Leorio had been getting the drift that the boy had an issue with defying authorities. He wondered if he'd bribed the caretaker.

"There are usually a lot more people here. I thought I'd enjoy the privacy for a couple of hours" He grinned.

He felt like punching two teeth out of that smirk. The punk was just thirteen, what he believed he was?

"You're not a good influence for Gon" He concluded, eyes closed.

"I'm the one most aware of that, trust me" Killua said with a serious demeanor.

"So…” the doctor said expectant.

Killua rested his face in one of his fists as he sighed "You're here because I …wanted to explain.”

"Serves well for an hospital fee"

"Don't get too cocky" Killua grinned. And slumped slightly "I know I owe you…”

"You had me out of my mind- out of-and I couldn't even tell-"

"You worry too much"

"You don't know how to take care of yourself" The doctor spat. "Your stitches are now wet"

Killua remained quiet a second, and added amiably "It's because you don't battle that much. You're not used to stuff I am"

"Then it was a battle"

Killua exhaled deeply. And looked up, searching for the blue eyes. Gon always paid his debts. Gon hated to be indebted.

"Ok. I won't go into details, but I just wanted to tell you the following: It's all taken care of. You don't need to worry"

"Right. As if you're life being threatened was an everyday fare"

"Actually it used to be" he smirked.

Leorio gave him a blank look.

The albino sighed. "Ok.. Look..I settled things. I know you're concerned.. but see, regarding the threat, I have my pride so I called my family. They've taken care of all. There's nothing to worry about now”

"They did? You called them? You haven't spoken with them for years"

"Their future heir was at risk no?” he said smoothly.

Leorio tried to look through him.
The white haired boy returned his stare, his eyes unfathomable mirrors.

"You don't need to worry-"

"Why did you got hurt in first place"

The albino who had been drenching his shirt and shorts with clenched fists as he spoke suddenly stopped. He whispered in a low bothered voice.

"Isn't it obvious? Someone beat the crap out of me. The end."

Leorio tried to keep his expression bold as he raised a skeptical eyebrow

"It's true…" and Killua was now staring at his hands "he had this thing that made it difficult for me to protect myself with Nen"

The non-believing surprise must have shown in his face because Killua interrupted his line of thought

"It's true- I'm not lying…It was awful I-' but he stopped himself immediately.

He'd lost his composure a second there.

"The point is… it's all taken care of. I just need to ask you to keep this to yourself. You know, family business"

"…"

"I could get in real Zoldick trouble if you don't. Please"

The answer didn't come.

The doctor rested his elbows on his knees, while his crossed brow formed a wrinkle over the bridge of his nose.

Suddenly the albino couldn't tell if he'd been believed or not. It tensed his neck and made him bite his inner cheek, because it was the best lie he got.

Finally the murmured answer came as Leorio's eyes softened.

"It's awesome it's taken care of… but.. are you ok?"

Killua stood in silence. He felt detached relief.

"I am"

Leorio sighed in resignation "Well, I suppose it's no use to remind you that you were forbidden of swimming. Your cuts and stitches-"

"They're fiiiine"

" Why were you in the pool anyways, at this time?"

"...I missed swimming"

An enthusiastic Gon had tempted him to swim when Leorio wasn't looking. Of course the raven was unaware the true reason of his refusal was that he wasn't exposing himself again for the entire gold of
the world.

But he did miss floating.

"You'll have to let me check the stitches in some days. We have to take them away"

"Onto other subject" the albino brought his hands under his chin. "Say… you wouldn't know by any chance if Kurapica's here on…business?"

Leorio's eyes widened in surprise

"why do you suggest so?"

"Ah, I figured you were closer to him than I am…" Killua muttered to himself.

"Yes, but he's even more closed down than you are" he said accusingly.

Killua stifled his laughter "You're not going to forgive me as easily, no?"

"No," he pushed his glasses on a reflex movement. But finally gave in the smile. And then he asked "Why do you think he's here on business?"

"Because he joined Gon for an entire day in one of his hunch-drawn adventures. Only I do that" he emphasized.

"You think he was doing something else?"

"Maybe. Just a thought"

"Just a thought?"

"Yup. Probably my idea"

He'd planted the seed. This was just like that inception movie. He now had a personal spy he could rely on regarding the subject.

"Really? A hole in the roof of the car? That's the reason?" Kurapica frowned.

"Yup. Pretty much"

The day had awoken gray and foggy. At times you could barely see more than three meters of ocean beyond. They'd said in the night it'd been even worse. The mist kept all taking in hushed voices and all clocks standing still.

So they'd decided to spend the day inside, doing some training.

Kurapica insisted worried.

"But does your wrist still hurt?"

"Oh not really." It did, but it wasn't broken anymore. He wasn't intensification type, but he tried to apply some healing every time he could.

"If it does again, I can help you" the blond smiled "Oh. Here it is" Kurapica recognized suddenly the halls from the labyrinth they'd been walking. He indicated Killua to turn left. They both went through some huge Plexiglas polarized doors.
And now they stood in front of a vast training room. It was a little like the giant gym at Kukulu Mountain. Or maybe like the one in Greed Island where they'd played that volleyball match. There were mats everywhere, weights scattered, and a basket of balls of different game types. The walls were perfectly smooth mirrors.

It was quite spacious to Killua's satisfaction.

"Is Gon coming? Or you're training alone?" Kurapica turned wondering where the other kid was.

"No, he is coming, otherwise it'd be dull. Wanna stay and practice with us?"

"Actually I should" Kurapica mused "Not to get rusty. Maybe I'll join you later.

Killua smiled delighted and added.

"Thanks for making the reservation. For two hours we'll own the place!" He said eager.

"Yeah, well, Leorio told me of your methods"

He probably meant the pool and Killua smirked giggling a bit "That old man…"

*Five years older* Kurapica calculated.

But he could tell the albino's mind hadn't lingered in that, quite happy at the prospect of smashing some stuff. He was avidly examining the room as if checking how much damage it could sustain. Suddenly, though, his gaze turned to him.

"Hey Kurapica…" Killua trailed, but paused.

By the change on his tone you could tell they were entering another field of discussion.

"Ok. You're going to ask me a favor" The blond added in that silken tone of his.

Killua smirked

"You think that ill of me?"

"You've done me a lot of favors Killua. It would be fine If you asked one for a change" he replied evenly with gentleness. Killua observed him.

"Ok then. How exactly does one do the nen conditioning pact?"

It left Kurapica silent.

He examined the boy in front, as this one casually took a ball in his hands while still looking at him for the answer.

Slightly unable to hide his expectance the blond noted.

First the bruises. Now this. Self effacing eyes, acting as if he'd just asked an innocent question.

"… Why do you want to know?"

"Nothing. Just out of curiosity" he shrugged.

The blond frowned. It wasn't a satisfactory answer.
But he didn’t press any further. He just sighed the automatical answer

"I won't tell you" His voices was soft yet categorical. Killua was about to retort when he interrupted in "Killua, when you are faced with a challenge that forces you to use something of the sort… then maybe I'll teach you"

Killua countered ready.

"That is not an efficient reasoning. Maybe next time it comes in handy we'll be in the midst of a battle, our lives in the line and a little late for condescending moral lessons no?"

Kurapica laughed softly.

"It's true." He paused. And decided to be sincere "Ok. I still think I won't ever teach it to you"

Killua turned away his gaze as he bounced the ball in the mirror with unattended dexterity.

"It's because it's me" he said smoothly.

"You being a small part of my negative. I wouldn't teach you guys… any of you… not… Leorio, not Gon, not you..." he muttered. Certain responsibility bound his words to the invisible weight on his shoulders. But he shook his head and answered gently "A nen master would be better to teach you than me. One that helps you develop a good strategy. And most importantly, one that helps you distinguish for what reasons to use it."

The words lingered a second. He paused and proceeded "There are all kinds of conditioning pacts. Some can turn deadly. The resource…. It's just too powerful" His voice treaded, trying to explain.

The albino gazed into the clear eyes with curiosity, suddenly not bouncing the ball.

"You…" he muttered. Knowingly stepping unto thin ice "Do...you ever regret it?"

Kurapica stood silent a second. Killua almost bit his lip regretting the last. He'd brought sorrow to that expression. Gon would have maybe looked disapprovingly. Or maybe Gon would have asked the same questions, had he been given the chance...

Kurapica took his time to answer. And the albino was now definitely biting his lip. He wasn't the kind of person to meddle into other people's business. He'd always been a loner himself. Except for Gon.

But he had to pry.. in order to learn something. Anything.

But Kurapica did speak, as if trying to be truthful. His voice somehow came hollow. And knowing.

"No…" he murmured and paused.

"No… I don't regret it. " This time more steadily. "Though at times it becomes hard"


"After all, sometimes bearing the brunt of your own actions may forever prey your mind"

Killua kept silent. He meant Paku. And he knew it spoke to him as well... hitting close home. He felt his mouth dry. He forced himself to derail his thoughts from the implication. Focus.

"But if given the chance would you teach…" he trailed.
"No… I'm sorry, but I won't teach you" he ended "No. Except that you give me a very good reason. Curiosity doesn't qualify" His eyes gazed with gentleness. He was throwing the hook to the pond, examining carefully if it got caught.

But Killua turned away self effacing eyes to the bouncing ball, thinking. Not evaluating the chance of exposing his case, no, that had always been out of the question- the possibility didn't even cross his mind. He, instead, lingered in the part of having witnessed the emotion it all held for Kurapica.

As if he'd been invited in. It made him feel somehow wrongly vulnerable…As if more aware of how he himself needed help... He repeated the phrase over and over, he needed help…helpless…a way out… words.

That weight the Kuruta openly held making him more conscious by the second of his own weight, the gravity of his body rooting him to the spot as he rolled slowly the ball in his hands.

He sighed under his breath.

"Kurapica… do you ever have nightmares?"

The blond was perplexed.

There was certain plead on his voice that alarmed him. At examination he only encountered again violet self-effacing eyes. Was that fear?

"I…"

Just then the Plexiglas doors burst open.

"HI! I'M READY! TO KICK YOUR -Oh Hi Kurapica!"

A bright Gon jumped inside, ready for action

"Hello Gon" Kurapica smiled "Seems you are cheerful this morning" He looked at Killua again, but this one had turned away. He was now again at the basket of balls.

"I am! You're training with us?" Gon said eager

"No, not now, but maybe I'll join you later." Killua now joined them. Kurapica looked at both of them and lowered his voice "Now I'm going to go yell off Leorio to tidy up our room. If he refuses I'll probably hide his suitcase" he said with an accomplice hush. The boys chuckled. They all knew the crazed rabid dog he could get when that happened.

"I'll ask for your help should problems with him arise. You are particularly good at bothering him" Kurapica concluded.

He stalled two seconds looking at Killua, suddenly feeling young. As if wanting to say they'd continue that conversation later. But he hesitated, not finding the right words. He finally pointed the door awkwardly and waved goodbye to both of them and left.

It took some moments for Killua to realize Gon was looking at him eagerly.

"What"

"We're fight-training!"

No, he couldn't mimic Killua's monotone, and so he let his voice rise in eagerness.
"Ooooh right!" Now Killua's eyes had lit too, already grabbing some balls to throw at Gon. But then he stopped.

"Gon, can we try something first?"

Their bodies were glistening with sweat from the strain.

"You're-really-strong" Gon breathed hardly, determined angry eyes focused on violet murdering ones.

"DI—I-E –DIE ALREADY" A pearl of sweat fell from Killua's chin as he struggled against Gon with all his strength.

The raven boy held him locked against the mirror wall. The trick was that he was using his Nen to enhance his strength while Killua wasn't.

At the moment Gon was using just a regular amount. If he was panting was because he had to actually make effort to refrain himself from using the usual he did when fighting.

The fight had begun with him pushing Killua against the mirror.

Swoosh.

No nen to fix the Zoldick to the floor, so a silver blur had been sent crashing all into a thousand pieces, but he'd already stood up from among the wreckage and launched at Gon bloodthirsty. He'd been stopped with only moderate difficulty. Gon reminded to use his Nen at its minimum while he struggled with a crazed in zetsu mode Zoldick.

But all the times they tried it ended like this.

Now the albino had his right arm crooked over his head, his body pinned against the wall. He'd managed to grab Gon's arm with that right hand. The left arm was also helplessly pinned to the wall though. His knee separated them. The little nen amount strength actually cutting the albino's blood circulation.

He was struggling bad just to free himself, not even on offense, just defense as he gained advantage then receded then inched slightly again to freedom in silent wrestling. But Gon watched with fascination as murderous eyes stared right into his own, struggling, struggling. Killua bit his lip strained. His arm was trembling from the effort.

" why-don't you DIE"

"Because I'm using nen…" Gon Said in between pants slightly unable to smile. Suddenly he dropped the effort. He didn't see the point of it. But he was thrown backwards as Killua launched at him ready to kill. When Gon's back hit the floor he'd already activated his own nen again in natural defense; but oh, so had Killua. Shimmering violet fizzed his hair, deep animal-like eyes fixed into his as he jumped to attack.

Only then the fight turned more interesting.

He'd kicked Killua in his stomach, sending him flying. This one felt the sting extend to the gash at his hip but had protected himself with nen while grabbing Gon's elbow. Half twisting it as he lifted him too, to throw him away with strength. Gon with agility fell on his feet and launched.
By the end of it all- balls included at a moment- two more mirror walls had been crashed.

They always had fun. All types of it.

Now they were sprawled and panting, their back on the mats staring at the ceiling.

Trying to catch their breath.

"That…was…fun…" Gon commented.

He looked over at Killua. This one still stared at the ceiling. He breathed resigned

"It didn't work" He felt some of the old wounds and bruises begin to protest but he decided not to listen.

Killua turned over, now lying on his belly. He supported his elbows and rested his head on his hands thinking.

Gon also turned over, resting his chin on the floor.

"It was obvious it wouldn't work. It's too uneven"

"mmmm"

"And unfair"

"Fair won't save you in battle."

"True" Gon nodded thinking.

"What would you do Gon?" Killua tilted his head curious. "Faced with something like that, what would you do?"

The raven had a troubled expression. He didn't know what he would do. He was far too impulsive. And Killua didn't let him try the situation reversed so that at least he could try to imagine. He had refused categorically with harshness.

"Again, where did you see it?" The raven asked.

"…er, once, in a fighting ring, at York shin. One of the guys had this ability that. I don't know how it worked, but if forced his opponent into zetsu. I have no idea how... But since then I've wondered… If that happens to you, what can you do? What are your options?"

Gon thought

"It is really a terrible situation" he mused. "Maybe I would put distance between me and my opponent"

Killua shook his head. "yes, I thought of that. The problem was that the box ring wasn't enough distance"

"Oh" Gon said troubled. But then he nodded "Probably the strong guy had already calculated the area of his ability"

"…it haunts me… I mean.. what can one do if faced with that?"
Gon, now on his back, lifted his fingers in the air, tracing imaginary patterns.

"You know? It's beginning to haunt me too. I mean, how many hunters are there in the world? Six hundred? That's not much. And he's among them"

"No. maybe not" Killua said defensively. A slight edge to his voice. "Maybe he didn't have a hunter's license but knew how to use nen. It could be anyone...I guess I'm just being cautious"

"But there aren't that many nen users either..."Gon trailed thinking, curiosity brightening his features "What kind of hatsu you would need to achieve imposing zetsu onto another being?" He continue to wonder amazed "maybe manipulation... or... some form of emission? mmmm...or... oh! I know! Materialization!" But then he interrupted himself murmuring "No wait, that's not it, 'cause he is specialization...but still!"

"he?...who?" the zoldick was lost.

"Kurapica. He also is able to do that" Gon spoke as he stood up "When he uses his dousing chain to envelop you like a snake... he forces his opponent to zetsu. That's why Ubo went first' his voice softened a little at the end. "He was the strongest. If the strongest one in the Spider could not break his materialized -but-nen-enhanced- chain, no one in the spider would. We just have to ask him how he did it!"

Killua stood, looking weary

"A nen conditioning pact might sound familiar..."

"Oh... that covered the zetsu part too?"

"Good luck asking Kurapica to teach you"

"Wow. Wait. You did? You asked him to teach you?" Gon attempted to come near with curiosity but Killua was already bouncing back and forth in deep reflection "I'm worried! We should be prepared to encounter anything. We should be able to defend ourselves from whatever may come. We should at least come up with a strategy should something like that arise in battle. Because if not we would be left defenseless. And that cannot happen."

He spoke in the rhythm he paced, slightly exasperated.

Gon took his shoulders and wheeled him "Let's call Biscuit" If something bothered Killua, then it was probably something worth noting. After all he was the prudent one in the team. If it weren't for him, they would be dead already. And something big, in regards of battle, required certain redheaded girl.

Killua thought

"I suppose we could"

He was thinking on the uber-mentor when two things happened at the same time. One was that he became aware of his sweat. He felt it running down his back under his black t-shirt. As he did so he became aware also of wetness on his hip.

On his hip...? It was sticky-Fuck.

That's when - about to place his hand over the wound for cover cause it obviously had reopened-Gon yelled
"EARTHQUAKE!"

Two seconds later, BAM, the world spun.

Both boys went flying to one side. The ship had shaken violently once, sending them with many balls flying everywhere.

They hit painfully one wall. Killua felt his back hurt and the fabric of his shirt sticking to his hip. The back of his brain registered they'd hit the one and only wooden wall, thankfully or not. He hadn't now the shards of glass as an excuse for an open wound.

"Killua!" Gon said from under a ton of balls "you're ok?"

"Yeah. And you?" He felt now on delay the pain of the gash he'd put away during their fight. He'd been reckless. His hand crept under his shirt to shut the sting away. And found it bloody wet.

"yes!"

"Why on earth would you yell earthquake? That was probably the ship hitting on something" Killua said with clenched teeth as his hand placed over the gash with more pressure.

…and he summoned electricity.

He winced and bit his inner cheek. He focused on Gon's words.

"I just sensed something was coming! I didn't even now I yelled at all" Gon laughed, raven hair emerging from all the colored bouncing balls.

Killua could smell the burnt flesh. Charred flesh that would replace the open blood vessels… unexpected situations called for desperate measures.

He immediately wiped his hand in the inside of his shirt. He'd wisely chosen black fabric for training day...

He scanned the room. Near him was the backpack he'd brought. He leaned ignoring the pain it took doing so. And he took out the water bottle. He threw it over his head.

That would give his shirt many dark blots. One being darker than the rest, the raven wouldn't notice.

He focused on feeling the wall against his back. When he opened his eyes caramel ones where there extending a hand.

He took it and stood.

"Let's run! We should be at the deck helping!" Gon was already crossing the Plexiglas doors. Killua noted his warm hand hadn't unleashed him but pushed him along. Tanned cheeks were tinged from the promise of a new adventure. He would probably volunteer as a scuba diver...The albino found himself looking at his friend. He immediately changed his expression becoming aware of his surroundings. Floods of people were gathering in the hallways, all going to the deck alarmed. He tagged along, calculating.

Exactly as he thought. On deck was everybody- except ominous person number one. But Kurapica and Leorio where there, curious as to what had caused such a commotion.

Word was being spread they ship had ran aground. Words flew saying the sea floor at those latitudes
was quite uneven and deceitful. That and the mist had done it. Others spoke of damage, alarm and even rescue boats.

"Hi guys!" Gon greeted and ran as everyone to the rail to the admire for himself the dark dark sea.

Killua spoke aside to Leorio

"Hey man… I…kind of need your help" But then Kurapica was gravitating towards them and so he stopped himself.

Half hour later they assistants had cleared out that the Cruise was just stuck, no risk. But Gon had already volunteered to assess any damage undersea. Killua argued Leorio's strict orders forbid him of doing the same (But you won't get wet! - But I'll be cold – Again receiving that look of you, the only Zoldick in the ship, an inaccuracy he wasn't about to correct…)

He'd help above on whatever else was needed.

He actually helped lower down Gon into the seas. The strain to his side informed him it was probably not the smartest move.

When all was finally done he turned and walked past Leorio, brushing his shoulder. As he did so, he muttered "in my room".

Leorio stifled his laughter – such mafia displays the boy naturally used without noticing.

Killua's pocket vibrated. But one look to the number and he decided he wouldn't answer. He wondered if he was allowed.

Chapter End Notes

For all the waiting you've done :) Next chapter is also close to be finished. Tell me if you want to hear from Nanny again. I love you. I read each and everyone of your comments. Thank you so much…
Hi guys! here I present you a new chapter :) I'm sorry for taking so long, it's just I'm working so hard, and all the while studying for college, and paying rent, I'm always tired! x.x But your reviews really do encourage me... They do... they are like my fuel, they summon me from my gmail to come over and put working time into this.

Tell me of a bipolar chapter.

Warning: angst

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Music: Suzanne Vega - Blood Makes Noise

"What Is This"

Pausing dramatically in each word. And maybe his blue eyes had popped out a little.

Let's take it from the top. The doctor didn't like foggy cold chilly weather, Killua knew that. Besides he'd already been slightly angered when he learned the fact he'd been carelessly training – and in doctor's words *straining*-himself. Words like that made him smirk.

"Why would you do that? your wound can reopen its deep!" The doctor had said when he'd been solemnly informed.

"well, you see about that…"

And then he'd been sitting in the bed, much as he'd been days ago at the first medical checkup. Only that back then he'd been spared of consciousness at the actual procedure. Now he had to overcome his old paranoia.

Leorio stood there, in grave silence. Second guessing the doctor- who probably did not knowing how to phrase the following yet again - he'd taken off his shirt slowly, avoiding eye contact.

This *show* would soon be over.

He didn't blame Leorio for the expression. He himself reckoned the word pretty didn't form part of the description. Charred skin replaced the deep gash that throbbed in an insisting beat underneath. It fevered his side. A closer look told of dark rawness mixed with melted stitches into the wound. Yup, not nice. But otherwise he was healthy, no?

"How?" Leorio sighed

Killua just lit some sparks on his open palm as an answer with a sheepish smile. The ones he gave to
the ice cream lady to get sprinkles for free.

Leorio hadn't been a doctor for long but he'd seen all types of wounds, more bizarre and ugly in his college practice. He just didn't stand the thought of them happening out of carelessness.

"Why" he said impatiently

"Sorry for being…"

"Irresponsible, yeah it's clear you're sorry." He said harshly. "So?"

"Dude, don't be like that, I was training and it started bleeding, and I panicked" He shrugged.

Leorio rolled his eyes. That was what happened when you taught Nen to underage teens.

"But after that fatality-fever the other day, now I really know I can ask for your help" he beamed.

Manipulative bastard.

"There's no way this is not going to leave a scar now" The doctor growled "And the procedure is going to be tedious and painful for you. I've got to take those melted stitches out one by one with surgical tweezers" he took a closer look at the wound. Killua felt the slight discomfort while raising an amused eyebrow.

"Or whatever is left of them. Go roll over" Leorio turned to his suitcase resigned. "This could all have been avoided you know, had you listened me..."

"Ok Pops"

Leorio hid a small smile. Secretly he felt like an elder brother. He liked being of help to Killua, kind of taking care of the siblings he never had.

Killua looked at his hands over his jeans.

Roll over

He knew he felt conscious of his own breathing system. He wasn't going to like this. He just wasn't. And he would have to embrace the fact. Somehow he'd been hoping for an ointment and be done, closed deal.

He sighed. If that morning he hadn't had that fever, he would have stitched himself up on his own, it's not like he hadn't done it before.

He had a hunch though, that melted stitches were a different matter...sheesh

Once he'd stitched up Gon. They'd been at Celestial Tower fighting to the top together. They didn't even know about Nen yet.

It hadn't been two weeks since the guys had gone to the Zoldick mansion to retrieve Killua. He personally didn't get it, nor did he know yet how to place that in his personal history. But he was having fun. He was getting to know Gon even better by day. He was getting the hang of that friendship thing. And it was so cool.

Gon won against his opponent-the triumphant megaphones in all floors declared as they rang new brutal records earned by the kid. But that wasn't heard by the boys. He had this nasty deep cut on his palm when he left the ring that kept and kept bleeding.
"I have to stitch you" the nurse of the 150th floor had said.

Gon's eyes were huge. Was he scared? No it was more like he'd seen a dinosaur or something.

Killua laughed "Why the face! You've never been stitched up before?" Oh this was hilarious. So the kid in the woods was not that wild.

"Yes!" said Gon defensively and accused "Many times!" but then he lowered his voices"...But only by Mitosan"

"Oh but we'll be extra careful" the nurse had assured him through Killua's burst of laughter.

Who could say this guy wasn't funny! He went for Hisoka, and danger-and liked it- but now bore that expression-

But Gon had suddenly looked at Killua with determination. Silencing him.

"What" Killua had replied suspicious.

"You do it"

"What?"

"You were a killer!" - Cause he'd never minded saying that out loud, despite the general reaction of people standing near – "You certainly have done that before!" he said waving the injured hand which was distracting.

"No way" He suddenly felt like a deer in front of car lights, at those eyes.

"Why?"

"No, no and no"

"You haven't done it before?" Gon asked genuinely

"A thousands of times! But on myself! I'm not about to stitch you up!"

"Please!"

"No"

"Killua please!" he said desperate.

The nurse oblivious to the dialogue took Gon's hand but he snapped it out and looked at Killua again. "Pretty please!" he begged.

As they aged Gon had learned to stitch himself up-he'd had to do so countless of times and in truth he didn't care. But that expression somehow stuck into his retina on years to come. Those eyes.

Greed Island, with that match and that volley ball that Killua and no one else could hold, it was all over the you and no one else I trust- he sometimes liked to imagine...

"Killuaaaaaaaaa"

Leorio called.
He'd been sitting still, looking at nothing in particular.

He sighed. He'd asked for this. An infection to the wound would only mean one more complication to solve. Life only consisted of this stupid setbacks and idiot bureaucratic procedures one needed to do to pass the day. Like eating. Staying alive. BO-RING.

"Killua… I'm going to need you to rest on your back. I think I'll be able to see better."

"...Thanks for helping me again"

The doctor sighed a half smile. "You're not welcome. I'll check the others too, all right?"

At the pale youngster's expression he added "Don't worry, it won't take long" He'd tried to sound reassuring.

Killua erased all expression in his face and shrugged... Feeling shirtless, he nodded and slumped over the bed with indifference. He seemed... and Leorio's heart leaped at the realization... lifeless with that kind of eyes. It flashed his mind, the wondering if the boy bore that same expression when killing.

He approached, and sat at the side, taking one of his arms, and adjusting his lenses. Killua seemed absent.

He'd learned not to ask the boy. He'd tried already too many times without success in the past days. He just tried to keep repeating himself he was checking a professional hunter, not a teen, he shouldn't be surprised.

He checked how the contusions in Killua's arms were evolving, then the bruised ribs that would probably hurt him for some weeks… (sit and breathe. Good. Breathe again slowly. Mmmm… okay, now let me see the wound at your back… mmmm.) Many of the bruises where gone or in the process of fading out, because that is what Nen does. Now the cuts in the front and back of Killua still looked ominous even though the scarring meant they'd begun to heal.

He checked the gash now more attentively.

Killua shifted. He hated the feeling of the hands on his side. But again he still wondered why Leorio was willing to help him. Well, he probably wanted something back but he still couldn't figure out what. Leorio was first examining to decide where to apply local anesthesia which was a bit stupid if you thought whom where you talking to. Killua looked away, uninterested in the morbid view.

"Now I'll use the tweezers ok?"

Killua nodded and thanked in his monotone.

The feeling was weird- that of having the skin at his side now numb and pain-free as the substance applied worked its way in his blood stream. And yet he was able to feel the pressure of Leorio's fingers, and the pulsing fever at the wound. Sensations devoid of pain.

It just made it the slightest bit obnoxious- pain sometimes helped his concentration. Lack of pain augmented in a weird way other. Like when you touch your leg when it's asleep or your cheek after going to the dentist.

He knew he didn't care that much about whatever they did to that body- whether good or bad, that something that served so many purposes. He was shuffling other thoughts instead. Why...why was he letting this happen. The question he asked himself over and over.

-Leorio took the first stitch-
Gon, would Gon know? ...The voices in his head, the ones that acknowledged the factor in the
equation of what had happened... -cause in all other fields that had been and was unreal for utilitarian
purposes - well, those voices now began lashing in haunting echoes, as he knew they would. He
realized he was not sure this situation itself was happening at all. But that would drive him insane.
Focus.

Again that detached awareness of his body. A draggled body, the exposed skin, the known feeling of
being marred. Those weren't good thoughts. Unfocus then.

But with nothing but the white ceiling as an entertainment he felt the familiar seeping up of the of
known guilt- some type of guilt- he knew so many kinds of guilt- quite real, quite there, drenching
his mind with the known facts- he'd caused already so much trouble, at yeah, not being able to care
on his own and being the one at fault, involving others, involving Gon, he'd caused this, he'd caused
all this-

He shifted, with now a firm purpose to deviate his thoughts. Guilt wasn't useful or productive in
anyway unless he found a solution. But there was nothing else there but the empty ceiling that
mirrored the weight of his knowledge, the threat, the strength of the shame, the not being as strong as
to stop it all- and then- Then..

Another stitch.

With a capital Then, he'd admitted a long time ago that what overwhelmed him utmostlly was...
fear... At times incapacitating which was worrisome and therefore the object of the present analysis.
Palpitating near his chest. Fear. Fear. Fear. Fear... Gon...

It paralyzed him. It terrified him. Another stitch and he was about to ask Leorio to sing, as he did
when in the shower, yes, yes, so out of pitch it came out funny (do not think, do not think). Or hey,
talk about chicks, what's up with them, stop the voices in that crowded mind he owned and talk as
you usually do pal. But the doctor was silent. And concentrated.

The fact that Gon could not know. He could never know. He would never know. And now himself,
a step closer to that horrible edge..... of him knowing. No. he pulled the hand break. And he realized
detachedly his thoughts had gone from stumbling slowly to racing, racing, cause most important of
all... if Leorio knew, if Leorio knew, knew, knew...Gon could be in danger.

He felt his breath had quickened a little, his pulse a little higher. Because there was certain lack of air
in that room.

Those trifles, though, he could control. Not unlike those old men who ate too much salt and had
heart failures, the painful gnaw inside his chest wasn't a surprise but lodged in. The problem was as
usual his head. He looked at the ceiling trying to empty his mind.

He usually never failed personal endeavors, only that one. Emptying his mind. Of course it was
always a new day to try, that's what people told you.

Threat. Fear...Marred. Guilt. Knowledge. Shame. Threat. Fear...Fear...Fear...

He needed Gon right now to distract him... he longed to go outside. Or to play a videogame.
Because it was like being in a hospital wait room, in that state where you can do nothing but wait for
answers, while he observed his body being touched, watch and wait, watch and wait, watch and
wait. Not one action of his could alleviate the situation, nor the waiting would grow any shorter to
redeem the existence of his thoughts...Only certain person could save him from brooding and it was
nowhere to be seen.

Leorio was taking, with utmost care, one by one each of the blots of melted plastic stuck to burnt skin that ended in a stitch into the wound. Like doing the work of an artisan, with precision and pulling as slowly as he could manage.

"Don't shift" he reprimanded for the sixth time. He'd pulled the night table's lamp to get a better view.

His breath had stopped when he'd dabbed with iodine the cut on his belly. Now Leorio, with cotton dipped in antiseptic, was dabbing the gash, trailing down. It felt extremely unpleasant, burning on the deeper levels. As if to shake it away he closed his eyes, but sensations crept on him, at the rhythm of his own cursed thoughts. The cotton stick dabbing, a hand placed on his side where hands had traveled down, yes they had. Suddenly the actual awareness of Leorio's hands working and images, they all jumbled without warning-nails on skin, blood and laughter-

"What would Gon say"

He sat quickly in the bed. His heart at his throat... For a second he'd seen those eyes, he'd heard that voice...

He closed his eyes.

No, He could control this. He wasn't there, of course. He breathed again. Feeling young and stupid. Ok. Better... Stupid head-

Leorio obviously had stopped at the sudden movement.

"Killua? What happened? Does it hurt?" Leorio apologized

"No sorry. Ah..." Killua exhaled and smiled forcibly "Ok, continue" he leaned on his back again slowly. Determined to stand the lame simple procedure and not make Leorio any jumpier.

"You're sure? I can apply more anesthesia"

"Neh, it's ok"

Leorio, still hesitating, restarted. He cleaned a drop of blood that was sipping from the stitches he'd successfully taken away. Then he applied surgical adhesive, no longer trusting stitches.

... He was tracing the gash down where it stopped at the hem of his pants. Killua tried not to close his eyes this time, staring at the ceiling… but he could feel Leorio's hand at his belly holding the antiseptic. He hated it. The dead weight against his navel.

Focus. On how the bottom of the bottle was cold against his skin. And hands…hands placing round his waist -"you like it"

Ugh- internal wince. He tensed- not move- not to interfere with Leorio's work- get a grip of yourself.

Get a grip. It was an order.
The cotton was wiping away the blood he told himself. He felt his own hands covered in a perspiration film. His breath had become a bit more anxious. Leorio, noticing-of course he would- had continued with more care. He focused on the antiseptic bottle. But Leorio placed it now over the bed to make him more comfortable -he probably thought the wound hurt him. Right. It was now balanced near his hip…
Focus on the details like the small words in the bottle, do not think on how Leorio's hands - reaching the cut's end drawing down-And then carelessly resting on the hem of his pants- ugh- the slight pressure at the skin on his navel-He shut tight his eyes to avoid it, but the piercing dread-

"Not since I took you for the first tim-"

Killua jolted.
Making a mess- he tumbled the antiseptic bottle, which spilled over his navel, the bed, while his mind rang danger- it wouldn't stop and its wetness like the blood everywhere, on his back, blood. And in front of his eyes, images crashed: the glint of metal-pocket knife-beg-no-beg-yank hair – no! he clasped the sheets at his side- Leorio quickly cleaned the mess, a hand to his navel- hand- hovering over him– eyes shut tight –and the ringing laughter- “After all, you were the one that came here like a dog. Just like my beloved little puppet”

He pushed fiercely the doctor away and he retreated away away away as the images violently hit him-Dark laughter-system shutdown, hands -close the chapter, Killua- he'd closed his eyes tight shut, to shut it out- the "Don't what? Don't stop little brother?” at his neck- unzipping of pants- no! jagged images and someone calling him -And panting, his head kept down not to breathe, BEG-No-beg-yank-hair no- He tried to breathe but couldn't-images images- The slicing words and Gon- "Things you won't be able to undo" stop! but it wouldn't Killua was he screaming? Breathe, close it! close it! someone has been calling his name, stop! please stop! he was fighting someone, or he was being gagged cause he was not breathing he was dirty- those hands to his chest and waist and danger – Leorio was shaking him, images-voices-the dark laughter ringing- his laughter-his-his - Leorio shaking him Killua! He opened his eyes wildly- in the threshold of that dark room, and then someone adjusting the volume-

"Killuaa! ! !!"

Killuaaa...

"Listen to me! Killua! Listen! ! !!!" Leorio was shaking him hard."Killua! Breathe!"

And Killua registered he was in the room and not breathing, a strange wail from his own closed throat-

"Breathe, please breathe!

Not breathing.

He had to go through the mechanical steps- open mouth- gasping air. His lungs were hurting painfully. Dread closed his throat painfully tight. The dark laughter ringed and ringed- his-

"Breathe again!" he was failing. He couldn't breathe. He felt all going hazy, he heard his words, hissed words- hands clutching his throat-

Leorio insisted "Don't stop looking at me. Now breathe!!"

But he couldn't- into the dark room again with shut eyes to hand-sob-hiss-pain he pushed Leorio with anger again, stay faraway, but this one wouldn't let go and the horror clawing his lungs- And suddenly Leorio's voice again zooming in.

"Don't close your eyes Killua!" Leorio ordered firm. Killua opened them, hanging from his words like a safe line- air -air-air-air-air-air-

"Keep them open" It was an order. He obeyed. "Now breathe" he tried to breathe. Little air reached
him across the ringing laughter-

"Killua, listen. You are here. Everything is ok. Now try it again" Leorio said in a calmed paused tone.

That tone. He was trying to get through- Killua registered this through the roar. But he wasn't able, to un-clutch his throat, he couldn't-he couldn't- He shook his head not to hear it again, ever again-

"Ok look at the bedspread. Focus on its colors, what colors are they? Tell me"

He tried to grasp reality without air on his lungs. He really did put the effort and try, Leorio still held his shoulders. He looked at the bedspread and tried to focus- and inhale- and make his tensing jaw and tight throat choke out words.

*Focus.*

"bl...bl-blue... blue...blue-...." His words were hitched " a -and...and-wh-white" he swallowed air painfully.

"come on, stutter dwarf that's not white, what is it?" Leorio said gently. Killua shook his head.

"...ye-yellow"

"good, so blue and yellow. What other colors? I see more"

Killua focused.

"bl-blue... gr.-e-e-e.....gre...een..." he struggled, a strangled gasp "r ...re-red... red...ye-ye...llo-ow..."

"Good. Don't move stutter dwarf"

Leorio then in a rapid move grabbed his suitcase and flung it open. Leaving one of his hands on his shoulder to keep him steady. The boy's own hand was clawed up. He was shaking, rapid breaths hitching his chest so fast it didn't rise at all.

Leorio faced him again concentrated. He was trying to avoid using his suitcase though. But the boy still was not breathing.

"breathe"

He'd forgotten again. Mechanical steps. Open mouth. Inhale. Strangled throat not letting him. He just settled in short rapid gasps and swallowing air. It was hard work. As if the muscles in his throat were cramped.

"That's it... breathe..."

There was silence...only his labored breathing.

"good..."

Minutes carried on with him just focused on Leorio's tie while breathing, breathing, somehow the effort consuming all his attention, even deafening the loudest super-ego to just breathe, breathe, breathe.

Leorio's eyes kept clinical all the time. Safety anchor to reality, yes, where words, damned words continued to play shadows.
But as the seconds ticked, some of the fear finally did seep up his expression darkly.

"Are... you better?" The doctor whispered.

There was a silence only cut by his gasps. Killua could not dare to face Leorio now so he nodded. He still could not breathe properly. His breath was still hitched and felt totally out of his control his lungs hurting.

What had happened. What had happened. What the fuck had happened.

"Leorio...I'm...sorry..." his breath caught with him. Explain-he-had-to-but-could-not.

He stopped and tried to start again

"I'm so-sorry, I'm sorry... I'm I... I... c...aan't- I-just- can't do this, n...n-not...I had not-t pla...nned that you...you would-you would" his breath caught with images and jumbled incoherent thoughts as Leorio shushed him "Gon can ne-never know... I can't d...I can't do....this right now, Gon ca...nt"

He tried to catch the air, but he couldn't, closing, closing his air vents.
He gasped for air and he could not breathe-stupid body breathe- Air, air, needing air and breathing faster "-can't". Leorio looked again at his suitcase with one hand as he steadied Killua.

"don't talk, just breathe Killu, stay there"

But he couldn't, there the knot in his throat impeded him from breathing. He shook his head "can't-can't..." Hilarious no? Spots danced in front of his eyes and and wouldn't he rejoice seeing him like this weak- air-air-air-air-air.

Leorio rushed as he calculated swiftly, riskily, what would be a Zoldick-appropriate dose, already with a syringe in his hand. The boy felt a pinch on his shoulder and realized he'd been shot.

"Ok" Leorio faced him again, taking his shoulders forcing him to look up.

He found his firm gentle eyes.

"You are going to be fine"

"...No" Killua closed his eyes pained. why- And the image flashed - red trail down his knee. His hand flew to cover his own mouth, the other firmly clasping the mattress as he violently doubled over himself-

"Killua!"

As if he'd been kicked on his stomach. He kept there unbreathing, eyes shut tight, his throat closed. His hand around a knot of bedspread and the image imprinted there, there there, in his lap, forehead against bedspread barely holding his own weight - a second shot to his shoulder- he was shaken again, lifted by the shoulders. He shut his eyes in actual pain. As it sunk in, this, from all moments, what had been done to him.

Suddenly arms covered him.
He was being hugged.
He registered it, and felt the horror, but Leorio surrounded him with his big broad shoulders.

And then the tranquilizer hit his entire body.

...
The intake of air was painful, forceful.

Air glided into his chest...

It hurt. To just breathe hurt. And then his body gave way to the sedative. A warm wave rushed through his bloodstream. He was now weightless...

Just breathing…

Only breathing...

... His muscles were now fuzzy wool. He focused on the heavy drowsiness...It would only last some minutes or so… His back being rubbed.

Sensations similar as to when he was little, being trained and they told him to count backwards when injected… See how long he could keep awake before he gave way to some dose...

Leorio's soothing voice reached him as if through a fog.

"Killua. You are not in danger, you can trust me. I promise…please-"

His forehead was pressed to Leorio's chest as he chose not to hear. Not daring to move as his hurting chest breathed as if it wasn't his.

"Killua" he pleaded. Whispering as if chanting some prayer-or so it seemed under the fog "whatever it is that...that left you this way, please. I have to know, you need help, you really need help"

Leorio was pleading.

Killua registered he had never heard a similar tone in this person's voice…

His friend- he tagged Leorio. His friend. He still did not understand why he was in this situation. He just felt the usual detachment and extreme exhaustion.

The sensation of unreality, of surreality began tingling his skin. This had not happened. He breathed now slowly. Leorio was scared? He had to get a grip of himself. He inhaled again slowly. He concentrated on how it felt being rubbed on his back. It was warm. He focused on how air slid into his lungs, inhale, and exhale. He leaned against the feeling- the heavy exhaustion…

And the pain rooting its way deep somewhere in his chest…He closed his eyes.

He felt like crumbling.

But as much as he wanted he couldn't…Crying, he sensed he wasn't able.

Nothingness. That's the place that held him. It's ok... ok... Leorio's voice soothingly murmured, and if he said so-and if Gon's image lingered through the fog...A fog that his body slowly burnt against his will-will empty as a void, and his image…

...

Silence settled through his slower breathing, like specks of dust over them. Stillness like a quiet blanket as his body finished to burn whatever he'd been given.

Leorio exhaled heavily, holding the boy.
"We need help…” The doctor whispered. Almost to himself.

Killua noted his words. He felt certain reconnection to reality, and suddenly felt strongly alien to it all. What the fuck had he done.

He separated from Leorio slowly.

He was himself again... Breathing slowly...All in check...

He wouldn't ever look at Leorio's eyes again.

Silence…

"thanks" he murmured. He couldn't meet Leorio's gaze. He couldn't explain as well. Considering the mess he was now in though, he felt a strange cold calmness. He felt a hand on his shoulder.

"Killu"

"mm" he didn't look up.

"are you ok?"

The boy nodded determined. His breathing was slow, but otherwise had returned to normality.

Killua suddenly stood from the bed.
With that certain enchantment was broken. He left to a side of the room.
Searching for a t-shirt as if nothing had happened. God didn't he want desperately a T shirt.

Leorio stared.

At the prolonged silence the boy exhaled.

"I scared you. Sorry" he said in a soft monotone giving his back.

Leorio stood in silence.

"...Killua…"

"don't" he said tired.

"but..."

"please...don't..."

"no, come here…let's… I mean" he inhaled "you just-" Leorio tried, but the boy interrupted him.

"I know. It won't happen again"

Silence...

"You…” and there was an edge of bitterness to his voice "hadn't seen the other side of a trained killer uh? Child torture does get its toll."

He shrugged. And at the awkward silence he just put on the said t-shirt. He added "I should have been able to handle that, I'm sorry. Not professional at all" he laughed coldly "But that's all I'm fine"
"..how can you talk about professional or not professional-"

"I'm expected to" he dismissed it with a hand wave

"...No. You're not. No longer"

That froze his movements for a second. He wasn't looking up but the way his eyes flashed told him he questioned the truth of the statement. But he deflected all.

"You must have freaked out at the moment no? But seriously, it's nothing" he gave him his back, now on the search of his hoodie. Leorio insisted

"No! First, days ago someone -"

"It had nothing to do with the… other day thing. I don't know why now I…leave it".

"You're having nightmares"

...

Killua did not turn.

"Gon told me. You're waking him at night." He said with urgency "He asked me to give you something."

Gon…

Suddenly Killua turned. He opened and closed his mouth. Once. Briefly. Trying to speak...But avoiding his gaze...

He wasn't able...

And Leorio inhaled. Killua's expression was pained. So...pained. And again, that fleeting second where his emotions were unmasked. Just that pained look through violet eyes that were pleading.

...

"leave it" he whispered finally.

Leorio closed his eyes. At the image.

He had to restrain himself from all his natural impulses. Of retorting. Of asking. Of approaching the boy...Knowing he would withdraw further away. The doctor bit his inner cheek.

And he opened his eyes and fixed them aseptically on his suitcase. He reached for it and searched. After fumbling a while he took something out. A small bottle. Inside rattled a few little blue pills.

"...Here So you can sleep..." Leorio tried to sound nonchalant. He felt anything but that. "The deal's closed. I won't ask anything else. Just ask me for refills"

Killua was taken by surprise. He took the bottle. And held it in his fist.

"If you have problems with your wounds, you know my room. Now you can leave"

"you won't...?"
"no"

Killua was cast down.

"that's...that's what I need"

"I know"

Killua nodded to himself. He took a hesitant step forward.

"Thanks" he said in low humbleness. "really...thanks..."

And with another step he gave Leorio a swift hug.

The doctor opened his arms surprised looking down at the smaller boy. But Killua just as swiftly had separated. The boy picked and put on his hoodie, and muttered a "thanks" and a "see you on deck" under white bangs before leaving swiftly.

Leorio looked at the closed door for long moments after the boy left.

...

Yes, half hour and Leorio sat on the bed. Brooding.

Of course he wasn't going to sit and do nothing.

But do something about what? What was the situation? What had happened?

What is his role here? He is just a friend.

But then he remembered the scene. And he covered his mouth unconsciously with the back of his hand. It was Killua! What had happened? He exhaled heavily. Killua needed help, Killua was his friend, time told him it been three years since he met the kid, they'd grown under his skin and he would do whatever to protect him, of course he would. So he would help him, he would! but how, how? What had happened? and why? why was he so avoidant, why was he so...scared.

He heard another sigh echo him from the walk-in closet in coherence. He totally agreed with the echo.

Wait-what?

He found himself running toward the source, half thinking -burglars-half thinking "I'm going crazy" when he stopped at the entrance.

"Kurapica?"

The blond, just wrapped in a towel was sitting in a reflective trance in the floor of the walk-in closet. But at his name, he turned his head to find Leorio staring at him in disbelief

"WAAAAH!" manly shriek

"WAAAAAAAAAAAAAH!" Leorio screamed back.

Kurapica stood immediately saying "I can explain- ouch!"

Yes, on his way up his head bumped with one of the shelves. And in slow motion that shelf came off
its hinges and fell over him, with all the clothes it contained

"Kurapica!"

"OOOOOWW!"

He'd disappeared now under the wooden shelf and the many many garments.

Leorio knelt to rescue his friend from the bundle of clothing.

"Hey, you ok?" He picked easily the shelf up. Kurapica still protested half covered by-

"THESE are your underpants! UGH it couldn't get worse! Why why are we sharing rooms!" and then he heard for the first time the blond curse. Leorio burst in laughter.

"Stop laughing!" Leorio was knelt now in front, but at the reprimand, he just took a black slip tangled in Kurapica's earring. The blond snapped his hand away, but being buried in a bundle of undergarments did not make him look the least threatening.

"Don't come near me" Kurapica growled.

"why? Because you are covered in my undies?"

"No, because I'm naked!" he growled again.

Leorio burst out in laughter.

"STOP" the blond hissed like a boiling kettle.

"I- ha- ha-ha, I just deserve ha- ha-ha a good explanation"

"I took a shower. And was here...

"The whole time? on a towel?"

"I noticed I had no clean underpants of my own… Now, I had some more in my bag which is outside and was on my way out when you came in and I was stuck-"

"why didn't you just put pants?"

"I'm not about to come out on commando with you in front!"

"I do it all the time."

"EW!"

"I'd like to see you try!"

"agh, shame on you, you'll never find me in that position, I have my dignity!"

Leorio burst in laughter

"yes yes, now it's failing me of course. But what was I supposed to do? You entered saying like "Enter, Kurapica is not here, don't worry!"

Leorio opened his mouth and closed it and laughed again.
"what"
"nothing"
"what!" the blond was really uber mad

"you'll never find me in that position" he mimicked "I was going to say "in what position" but knew you were going to be pissed"

"yes"

"hah, you see? Even though-"

"And that topic is of boundaries"

"but then it doesn't matter that much if you're naked or not uh?" He extended a hand. He was not laughing anymore, just smiling gently. Kurapica rolled his eyes, faint pink tingeing his cheeks. He searched, still covered in socks and stuff, for the towel, and covered himself as he stood up with help.

"Ok. Just for your "dignity" I won't look. Even though again, it doesn't matter after-"

"Off boundaries"

"yes, yes"

Leorio turned and brought Kurapica his bag. But as he placed it on the floor of the walk-in closet he stopped.

"Kurapica…"

The blond looked up knowing what was coming...Leorio hesitated

"you heard, didn't you"

Kurapica's eyes were serious. Reflective. He nodded slowly.

"Leorio…"

"dress. First just…dress"

Kurapica nodded.

He felt like a dog in a dog pound, walking, almost running towards the deck. Oh he was tired, exhausted. But the helplessness he so hated had finally been replaced by restlessness and the usual anger, self loathing, the whole gang having some beers inside his head. Oh, wasn't he amazing, wasn't he te-rrri-fic, totally brilliant Killua, cheers to you! He drank the illegally obtained red bull in his hand. The need to be some place faraway from there, to escape all the consequences of his superb self-management, to forget the entire incident in the first place- humiliation- all drove him forward. He clenched his jaw. He was ready to kill some spiders or to throw his cell phone to the ocean, see how far it could reach. Or break it in two- he was about to do so, see how many pieces assembled the gadget and how much it took to render it useless.

But suddenly his own jagged breathing-and a new acquired fear of losing control- stopped him. He took his hands to the rail and felt the cold metal between his hands.
He slumped to sit at the edge, his feet dangling, his forehead pressed to the metal. He sighed calming himself because that wouldn't work either. This morning his only highlight for the day had been that Diablo III game coming out.

So it was possible. For him to lose control. The control of his own self. Of his own mind.

His cell phone. Inside his pocket.  
Inbox: One message received.

He observed for long the grey sea, the part that still was visible under the fog that enveloped the sea...

Just then he felt hands place over his eyes. His vision was obstructed but he felt elbows place over his shoulders.

"Guess who" a warm voice chirped.

His heart soothed one beat…He grinned faintly.

"hey..."

"no, no, no, Guess Who"

Killua smiled.

"...Jack Sparrow"

A silence followed

"You don't know who Jack Sparrow is, isn't it" Killua whispered amused, the corner of his lip lifting a little.

"Well, whoever he is, his name is weird" Gon noted. But immediately his expansive enthusiasm gave a rapid series of self invented explanations "Chances are he's a hunter! No, a spider! wait, a historian, a historian! or-"

"wanna bet?"

"yes! Ooooh I know. It must be a sort of legendary captain, mmmm, of a haunted ship of the seas abroad"

But then he seemed to giggle "I sound stupid, right? Ok, it must be the name of a serial killer… I know! He is Jack the Ripper! Now I'm totally sure"

Killua, still blinded, laughed softly the entire time. "For a moment there, you were sooo close"

"well, either way you are the one guessing wrong"

Gon leaned against him, placing his chin in Killua's shoulders.

"...guess who..."

Killua leaned into that closeness. It wasn't the usual- for a second it made him wonder if Gon was up to something-knew something-felt some-he cut his thoughts right there.

He just leaned his back against Gon. Now thoughtless. With an equally playful smile.
"Guess whooo." His sing song voice had hooted again.

"mmmm…lemme see... This person likes orange juice isn't it?"

"Yup!"

"and he is one with the woods" he said pensively. Gon thought about it.

Killua inhaled "He even raised a fox-bear on his own, in the forests no? Or that's too farfetched of my imagination?" The albino smirked. Being blinded made him aware of Gon's warmth, so different from the chilly fog and the cold metal rail in his hands.

"Nope, he did" caramel voice confirmed.

"…and he lived in a tree house"

"yes"

"and he misses horribly Mitosan. Every single day"

"yes-wait-What? Not true!"

"oh. Ok"

"I don't! I'm fine on my own"

"got it"

"I don't! it's true"

"uhuh. Sure."

Hands freed him to be replaced by a smack to his head.

"ow!" he massaged his temple "And that cleared it out"

"I don't!"

Suddenly Killua turned swiftly on place, so he was finally facing Gon. He'd done this so quickly he was almost less than an inch away from Gon's face. The corner of his lip curved upward as he asked, furrowing into honey eyes

"So you really don't?"

Gon looked down "…you were supposed to guess who..."

His expression was so cute. A string to his chest; and Killua swiftly stood up. Hands in his pockets he directed his gaze to the sea again.

Gon tagged along half smiling.

"you win..."

"at what?"

"…I do miss her. A lot" he sighed "And I hate you because now you will tease me for forever."
Killua smirked mischievously. But the undertone in his eyes was somewhat nostalgic. He looked ahead
"I miss her too". He did. And he kicked his own empty can away. It landed in the ocean far below (mind this cruise had seven floors). He thought Gon was about to reprimand him for the sake of the poor fish below when his hand was grabbed. And he found himself running behind Gon. It was the second time this morning that he did so.

His hand knotted to his own as he ran happily

"I have to show you something!"

As he tagged along he wondered… Could he count on him to come and do that forever? To come and warm what began freezing, to come and move what began to stay still and silent, could he ask- please do that forever. He laughed at himself- what with the content of his thoughts. And then he laughed at Gon, as they began to climb a hidden ladder. Gon repeated the word 'surprise' over and over as it carried them into the ventilation system that itself led to a trapdoor in some part of the roofed area.

Killua was the first to pop up from the trapdoor. As he climbed leaving room for Gon, he tried to distinguish what he was supposed to discover. There was nothing in particular in that bleak weather, just some seagulls that oddly nestled in between the painted metal tubes. No, it wasn't odd. Those carried hot water from the boilers, because they were warm. It was like when doves nestle in wires because the electricity warms them.

"It's a nice hideout" The albino calculated.

"It is. But that's not the surprise" Gon closed the trapdoor and sat beside him, in between the warmth of the tubes as well.

Gon looked at Killua expression, lost and wondering around…
He was perfect…He'd already checked out which were the escape routes in case there was an attack, he could tell.

Killua looked up and stumbled into that caramel gaze. His look, it was so intense… It made his heart skip one beat.

Gon smiled. And he whistled. Uh?

And then all, all the seagulls- which were clearly much more in number than what he'd given credit to- they all flew away startled by the sound. Or so they tried. Because to their legs were knotted invisible strings- he recognized fishing line threads- that tied them to the tubes.

All of them flying, so many, over their heads, like a cloud of wings and seagull chatter. Gon laughter rang.

You see… he had this plan…

---

*Today, same room, same hour. If you're late I can go pay a visit to you guys instead, room 212 isn't it? ; -)*

Chapter End Notes
A/N: LONG CHAPTER!

Again, sorry for taking so long. And thank you so much for your messages; you don't know how they help me.
I send you my love, wonderful readers
Chapter Notes

I'm so sorry for the tremendous wait! I've been with writer's block x.x I wrote everyday bits but it didn't satisfy me, it was awful. Finally this chapter came to light. Rewarding your patience, here is a looooong chapter for you :3.

I promised I would warn on contents so, again, this chapter does contain implied and non implied sexual abuse. The treatment is much milder though than in chapter 10. This is because I wanted to portray the coin's other side of last -enlivenment-chapter, detachment. It is already present in different degrees in many other episodes, particularly because it's one of the two poles in between which subjects to these situations oscillate drastically, with problems in the mid ground. I also bring you again Nanny to reveal important details to the case. She will be forgotten for some time after this though to move on the plot. There is good news: Soon I'm taking you out of this ship it seems ^^

I leave you with My Love, by Sia. I love it's almost lullaby quality...

Enjoy :)

See the end of the chapter for more notes

"Keep singing nanny"

The seven year old turned on her lap to look at her."Pweaseee" He said cheekily. His eyes taking the hue of the shade of the trees where they sat. She held him tenderly in her arms as she worked on his sneaker.

He'd been running all day everywhere, taking the summer haze in his skin and scraping his knees. Somewhere along the day he had made an awful lot of knots in his shoelaces, resulting in a tangle of proportions. She was patiently undoing one by one as she hummed.

"Let me try" he said insistently.

"Oh, but I think that with your small hands you'll loop this even more" she laughed.

"Then sing it again…please nanny" he rested against her.

The twenty year old girl smiled and begun again. The trees lulled softly in the warm breeze…the summer smells of brand new leaves and jasmine haze floating just above the grass blades... He rested his head on her collarbone.

"Little master, don't close your eyes" she advised affectionately. "You'll fall asleep, and then you'll miss when our friend comes in to eat the food"

He shook his head to clear himself. But then looked at the thousand knots in his sneaker.
"We'll never finish!" he pouted "...we'll be here forever...My shoelaces are dead, they won't ever be useful again" he murmured darkly. "I want to play with my videogames"

"And go inside in this beautiful day!"

Nanny laughed heartily unheeded to his cheeky gloom. Fondness gleamed in her gaze as she untied another knot. "Do you remember that day when we tangled my hair so-so much it was a mess?"

"Yes." The boy conceded a faint smile "You were aunt 'it'!" He murmured mischievously.

"Indeed I was!"

The small albino giggled

"But little master, did I crop my hair?"

"Noooo! Don't ever do that nanny!"

She smiled "Look at it today" her long honey hair fell over her shoulders like a beautiful wavy curtain. "Every tangle can be untangled" she lifted a finger.

"But your hair is soft!" he chirped. "Like Chipper's." he raised his head "I bet he won't come today. He's a wuss and frightens easily"

"He always comes." She said lovingly "He just takes his time. Besides, we brought all this food for him!"

The squirrel was still nowhere to be seen though.

"What if we go to see the wolves? They're definitely more rock star and-"

But he interrupted himself. Killua's eyes darkened. His young childlike features lost all trace of emotion.

"Come out" he voiced. Yes. Someone of his family was there, he just didn't know exactly who.

A fat boy came out from the underbrush looking distrustful. Nanny inwardly sighed. She noticed little master was relieved only by the way his shoulder blades relaxed against her. Killua asked shyly.

"What do you want Milluki" distrust to his tone.

The fat child smirked at this.

"Guess what. Brother wants to see you"

Killua stared in silence perplexed. He looked at those piggy eyes confused.

"Which…brother?"

Milluki giggled stupidly. "You know which one! ... Brother" he stared at Killua's reaction with vile expression. Little master had tensed in her arms again, but did not give anything else away. He dismissed him nonchalantly and looked at nanny.

"It's my free day! There must be a mistake". He protested his clear capricious child voice she loved so much.
Nanny was about to speak when Milluki did so first, with a disgusting smirk plastered in his face.

"Maybe it's because you need more training" he gave a bite to the cookie he held in his hand, and swallowed watching intently Killua from afar. "After all, I heard someone cried like a baby in the last training session with mother" he said with an evil glint on his little piggy eyes.

Nanny only saw the silver blur and felt an absence in her arms. And then, in front of her a little master over a tumbled down Milluki. With anger he was ferociously punching the elder boy who was twice as big as he was.

"Killua!" she rose.

But again and again his fist dived to the stupid grin Milluki still held, even as he was now biting dust. Nanny ran.

"Killua!" She grabbed the seven year old albino by the back of his t-shirt. She lifted him even as he gave another punch into the air.

He was so light…

"Leave me nanny! I'm going to kill him!" with strength he lost himself from her grasp and launched forward again.

"No you're not!" she said firmly and lifted him again by his shirt. Then, she looked at Milluki "you obnoxious child" she extended a stern pointing arm" go away"

Milluki stood shakily, as he cleaned dirt from his face.

In her grasp, the pale boy yelled crossly

"Die you-you blubber! You don't know anything!"

Milluki glared.

"Crybaby!" He yelled and ran away immediately.

Killua again launched forward in Nanny's tight grasp

"Little master!" she alleged sternly holding him. Killua slumped in her grasp. Nanny sighed and slowly let him down. She knelt in front of him, taking him by the shoulders. He looked to the ground.

"Little master, had I had a water hose near me, I would have sprayed you two with cold water. But you are not rabid puppies, are you not?"

"No… I'm not…"

The seven year old was cast down.

"I'm sorry…"

"Hey, little Killu…" she held his shoulders. But he interrupted her shyly

"I have to go nanny…Brother..." he exhaled and looked up to the skies "How lame!"

"Killu, we still have aaaall the weekend to do whatever we want. We can go riding Mike" But the
boy lowered his head again, not convinced. Nanny stood in silence. But then she bent over in an accomplice tone "oor I could take you to go skating to the town"

The boy swiftly looked up "you can?"

"I could ask" she smiled warmly.

Killua looked down and kept silent.

"It's not true" he mumbled.

"What is not true?" she spoke gently.

"What he said…I never cry" but he didn't look up.

Nanny took a strand of his silver hair and placed it properly behind his ear, with care.

"Oh that. You see, even if it was true, it doesn't matter much" she shrugged. Paying attention with subtlety to his reaction.

"No?" Killua looked up, surprise in his demeanor.

"No, it doesn't at all. You can always cry whenever you want if you feel like it and it'll always be fine" she stated simply as if it was a known obvious saying. "Otherwise it wouldn't be healthy and you turn fat" she shrugged again. Then, she drew near lowering her voice "he calls you these names because he is a little jealous" she nodded emphatically

"Really?" he said dumbfounded

"I'm pretty sure" she smiled

"Why? I would happily give him my place!"He said with anger.

He didn't look up, just thinking in walking back too Illumi's room made him so frustrated-stupid Milluki! Put yourself in shackles then! - When he found himself in Nanny's tight hug…

He relaxed.

At those moments he liked to imagine that he was a cat.

"Uuupsy daisy" she lifted him, letting out laughter like crystal chimes "aaaah I spoil you so much!"

She eyed him with care. "I'll bring you inside little one"

"I don't want to go training! I don't-I don't-I don't" He slumped against her.

"But meanwhile you do, I'll go ask about our going-out to town skating" she said with kindness "how about that?"

Nanny was the best.

Almost hiding Leorio watched from a distance as Gon and Killua sat devising a net to catch seagulls. It seemed the plan was to catch as many as they could…After having caught and tied all seagulls one by one they were now attaching to their feet the almost hundred messages Gon had printed and scribbled.
There was a variety you see. Short stories, invented jokes, quite a few with wonderful pictures they had taken themselves of the things they'd seen on their adventures. The majority though were nine gags.

You're kidding me—the albino had said skeptical...But yeah, the idea was that someone on the globe would read it via seagull. It seemed Gon had been like really uber-bored.

Kurapica approached Leorio. "You're kind of hiding….from them?" the blond raised one eyebrow.

Downstairs Killua's pocket vibrated yet again.

"I don't want to bother them" Leorio spoke softly against the glass pane in front. Even though they probably wouldn't have managed to hear had they'd wanted too. He stood one floor above them, gazing down at the smaller hunters through the huge windows of the bar, which faced the deck. The fog made it looked darker than what the hour suggested. That had made the place somehow more crowded.

"Come" He felt a hand tugging his arm gently "To the tables over there. It's not like they're going to look up anyway" The blond pointed the tables by the huge window panes.

Those too probably created the same effect wherever they went: you wanted to protect them, to help them, to side with them; they stuck to your fondness worse than gum to your shoe.

Kurapica was right; the bar was the perfect place to speak at ease without losing track of their younger friends.

'Answer'. That was the one word printed in the small cell phone screen. Killua's wary expression staring at the gadget was missed by Leorio as this one followed the blond to the tables. He also missed how Gon was about to attack an unsuspecting albino from behind.

As Kurapica sat across him in the window's reflection, Leorio caught on the struggle below, how someone had tackled the other, and somehow they'd become a mangled chaos of nets, seagulls and arms… The image gave you a minute of commiseration.

Poor seagulls.

They asked for drinks.

Just an hour ago he'd been with Killua in the room. Attached to as much promises as he'd never given before… Kurapica sat across him, with questioning eyes.

Elaine was knelt in front of a small cabinet that held his entire books. She was arranging the child stories by color, quite neatly, when she stopped all movement in a violet one. Without raising her face, she smiled faintly and voiced

"Come out little master"

The small boy emerged from one dark corner. He held an apple, which he tossed and grabbed in the air with handiness.

"You caught me" he chirped. And tossed her the apple, which she caught with a beautiful smile. He immediately grabbed the book in nanny's hand and turned its pages, as he walked nonchalantly to the nearby sofa. He sat himself upside down and let the book fall to the ground. He looked at the fallen object bored.
"Nanny" he said plainly "Kanaria… she told me she can't be my friend" he said impassive, trying to reach for the ground, upside down as he was. "I did ask her as you said" His hand tried to reach for the floor again, bored, as his hair fell upside down from his head. Any moment now, the sofa would turn over out of gravity.

He smiled faintly, tilting his head "I'm bound to have no friends Nanny"

She closed her eyes.

"She can't" she conceded hiding the heaviness to her chest. And knelt as she was she caressed the soft tresses of hair away from his face. "But that doesn't mean you don't have friends" she replied.

The smaller boy looked up shyly at the unspoken vow.

He met her honey eyes, her confidence.

He closed his eyes and did a swift summersault to land nicely on the floor. There, he rolled himself to hear her with attention, sprawled as he was in the ground.

Nanny proceeded "It doesn't even mean you won't have even more" her eyes lit knowingly as if she'd gotten an idea, but the boy interrupted her.

"Nanny, then you're my friend…” the small one mused resting his elbows on the floor.

Nanny observed him. She suddenly launched to tickle him, as she always did when he was getting too serious.

"Stop! Stop!" He finally laughed against his will.

"Of course I am! I'm your nurse, your nanny" And then spontaneously the young girl grabbed his small hand and drove him out.

"Now I'll show you how you can meet other friends" her voice rose with enthusiasm as she opened the door "follow me!"

That day they had met one of his many new friends, Chipper the squirrel. Because no one talked about animals when specifying the prohibition…

Killua soon suggested for their next animal friend, one of the wolves of the mountain. Nanny had accepted charmed

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Sometimes there's a certain unspoken tension when you don't know what to order in front of someone. Paranoia makes you think they will guess something wrong from you, get the wrong impression based on your liquor tastes.

Well, that was non-existent between them. They were too familiar to honor the uncomfortable usage as they ordered the same as always. The waiter greeted them with the usual small talk.

But as Kurapica and Leorio were left behind, an inverse awkward silence did follow. Deep blue eyes met his own... Oh, he was going to begin with a round of those analytical impassive questions instead of letting him explain—… He stopped his own thoughts at that. For starters, explain what, he wasn't sure. He didn't know how much he could ascertain of the confusing incident himself…but he looked up to meet the questioning gaze.

"They won't listen now, so… here we are" Kurapica tilted his head
"Yes" Leorio waited. He straightened in his chair, prepared for the cross exam as if he was a doctor. He saw Kurapica sigh. The blond crossed his hands.

"Are you ok?"

"Uh?"

The first question and he was already unsettled. Maybe that was what made Leorio nervous. Kurapica, being as brilliant as he was, came up always with unexpected reasonings.

"You…had it pretty rough in there no?"

So Blue eyes was truly worried. Leorio sighed.

"You would guess…" He shook his head "I felt like… working on pin and needles with my heart at my mouth, yes…" he let out sincere.

Just then the bartender brought their drinks. Polite thankyous and 'anything else' 'no', and the uncomfortable silence seeped up again in the table area. Awkward. The next question that floated in the air was the gracefully damned 'what happened'. But Leorio impatiently went ahead.

"Kurapica, what did you hear exactly?"

"…I'm quite lost…" he confessed."As I told you, I walked out of the shower, minding my own business" he emphasized" then I went inside the walk-in closet and that's when you entered."

"You forgot the part about being naked" Leorio deviating... But Kurapica ignored the obvious mental image Leorio now entertained as he proceeded.

"Then Killua asked you if I wasn't in the room… And well, frankly, you sounded so convinced I was at the other side of the giant cruise, I didn't dare come outside naked and say 'hey pals what's up? Shall I leave?' "

"I thought you were on the deck, helping the people…"

"I guess you didn't see me abandoning the place" The Kuruta took a sip of his drink. He proceeded softly "Leorio, I do understand though that I clearly stepped into something that wasn't my business…" he paused, profound eyes sweeping the table without truly seeing it, before they rose "and in another situation I would really try and pretend I didn't hear anything, because that is my morale. But… this is a different case. After that I…. need an explanation…"

Silence.

"After all…you offered to check Killua's …. Wounds?"

"…Yes…"

Leorio did not comment any further though. He didn't know what to reply… Kurapica sighed and settled evenly his elbows on the table, understanding. His voice a silky even flow of words.

"I thought at first that he probably had just fallen or had a minor accident. But then, well, you talked about stitches. Of stitches and of how he'd been carelessly training when he should have been resting." A golden eyebrow rose. "So I concluded quickly that I hadn't learned all the facts of what had happened a week ago" His voice unfolding smooth as gauze.

"…yes…he was hurt"
"But" Kurapica said gently "I think it's more than hurt, wasn't it? You told him you would check the other wounds... And I thought to myself 'oh, so there are more'... But the longer you took... I-and the words you chose, "now your back", "now your arm", ribs, cuts... and stitches... and wrists..."

Leorio looked at his glass as he nodded.

He felt enveloped in the silence-bubble of a diving helmet.

"...so I got it right"

The doctor nodded faintly.

It was much easier to hear Kurapica's reasoning and just nod or dissent than to form his own...judgment regarding his last week. Not that he'd had much to dissent to, clever as the guy in front was...

The low lights of the bar gleamed in the window pane, the same color of his friend's hair.

"...So you were helping him. In the room." Nod "But then I really didn't understand what was going on.... he..." Kurapica hesitated. Leorio drank from his glass and observed Kurapica's frowning clear eyes.

That.

The Kuruta seemed to rephrase two times in his head "Ok. My conclusions are scarce. I didn't understand what was going on in the situation. I just assumed that you had done something wrong with the stitches, or spilled the alcohol. But then Killua, he reacted..." Kurapica hesitated.

Now the silence was thick. Leorio settled his own glass on the table to cut softly its density. He exhaled

"...I believe he had a panic attack of sorts"

A matching silence followed...Yes, their smaller Zoldick.

Kurapica searched Leorio's eyes "...That is what I thought" He replied dryly, with certain difficulty to believe his own rationale. "I still don't know how he was hurt. But he silenced you didn't he"

Leorio looked again outside. So that's how long it had gotten Agatha Christie here to reason out all. Some twelve minutes?

And that's how long he'd been able to keep his promise to Killua.

"How long have you been helping him? How long ago was he hurt? What happened to him?" The question mark raised his voice with each new doubt. But then the blond seemed to backtrack. "No, I am... sorry really, it is not my business, Killua came to you after all-"

"He didn't"

Kurapica stared at the doctor who shook his head in silence. .

"...But Kurapica...Before, you were right... It is his business."He pushed his glasses up the bridge of his nose. "It's understandable for you to ask me all this after the room incident... but you heard him explain though, how torture in his past did take its toll and all... so his reaction, it's reasonable... All this... I'm sorry Kurapica but it's Killua's business. I feel uncomfortable talking about this without him so... let's settle it at this and talk about something else" he drank from his glass deeply.
"Somehow though bringing him here doesn't seem the best idea no?" The blond examined him. Leorio closed his eyes.

"But anyways... It is Killua's business..." Kurapica echoed softly.

"Yes"

"Mmm" Kurapica drank. Apparently not satisfied. He looked up.

"But Leorio...what would you do if you knew it involved something serious? That, say, involved his life?" he spoke plainly.

Leorio choked. The blond bore a deep unblinking stare. Until he exhaled. "Leorio, you really don't need to cover him up anymore..." Kurapica looked outside. His expression had softened.

"Uh?" The doctor thought he heard wrong.

"I... already knew before this incident, that- ... Well I think I was sort of... testing you... that is why-" he almost talked to himself as if questioning his own reasons but was interrupted

"Testing what, wait what, you know something?" Could he possibly know how to help Killua, could he possibly have a clue about what happened-

Kurapica sighed "I already knew that Killua's life, at a moment, was threatened" he exhaled, taking in Leorio's shock with certain regret "and..." Kurapica exhaled

"I actually believe it still is...so... I guess we don't need to change the subject."

Killua chewed gum incessantly as he rolled over the deck in his skate.

_I knew you would answer_

He'd tossed again the cell phone to one of his baggy pockets. A huge gummed bubble popped against his lips and he chewed again. Soon enough though, he spat out the gum with dexterity into a trashcan as he tried another skater's moved. He tossed another bubble gum to his mouth and chewed again.

He was passing the day just doing what Gon send him to do, dismissing easily what awaited like the gallows at the edge of the day. Gon meanwhile sang easily in the background of his mind...

Anyways, they'd tried doing so much that week he could even forget all of the other night.

Yes. Yes. Yes. For example, two days ago they'd gone out in the dark to explore the nightly jungle. They went from island to island on Snow, their now adopted nightingale (imagine the awesomeness of that). They had ended up running on the back of those huge double headed wolves on what they now called Gin's island.

...When Gon had finally decided to tell him the story of his personal wolf adventure, his lit up expression... well it was priceless...
The coarse wolf hair tangled against his fingers as he rode the giant beasts, the wind against his eyes and he felt certain form of bliss…

Of course he wanted to remain unmindful to the fact he was playing with fire. The 'tell anyone and he dies' amongst other threats, that wasn't real just yet. To believe that all was under control. There were some inhabited islands ahead but then they would lose his track. He would run off with Gon.
Feeling wolf hair under your fingers made you think this way you see... and yes, he'd saved that moment. It was just a fleeting second, but it was a good replay for the long walk through the night.

Another bubble balloon popped. He'd noticed how Leorio and Kurapica from afar had kept an eye on them all day... Had Leorio told the blond? He somehow felt Leorio would not betray him...

He did another skating move as he moved onto planning

Because he had been a former assassin, the Zoldick heir always carried hi-tech stuff with him. Yup, stuff he'd stolen the second time he left home, with Gon to his side. Quite important, young man (he would say to himself). Because one of those technological stolen gadgets was a minute transceiver attached to your ear, so that people could command you from afar. It was so tiny it could not be seen but only felt. It'd been useful in many of his and Gon's adventures...

He wasn't planning on being spoken directions through the receiver mike that night, though, oh no. He felt a bit like tasting music.

Now, given the situation someone might have thought it was lame...But right now it was his only resource available. He would program the artifact so that in a couple hours he would be able to listen to his Mp3 while other more grizzly incidents developed. That was the plan. Not to listen. He wasn't planning on attending to shard-like-words, to taunting like verbalized daggers, not from him who knew his nightly terrors so well...Not on those moments, no. He closed his eyes. He...wanted to remain oblivious to it all...
That being impossible he would at list maintain his dissociative fence.

He'd once been an expert...

Kurapica stared with unfathomable eyes to his friend in front.

"I already knew that Killua's life was threatened..." "I guess we don't need to change the subject..." the words hung in the suspended air.

Leorio gaped horrified. It took him half a minute to choke out an answer.

"You did?"

Kurapica exhaled. "And now you confirm me"

"But!"

"You sent me outside, the day of the checkup. Since then you haven't been the same. Days before, Killua came in with a bruised wrist. I could tell it'd been dislocated in the precedent hours. And then...you didn't expect me to believe the fever thing, did you? ...it was really lame"

Leorio adjusted his glasses alarmed "His wrist? The same one that- wait, he did have a fever!"

"It wasn't flu"

"But Gon- did he..."

"Leorio, Gon will believe whatever you tell him..."

"But..." Leorio took a hand to his head "but how?"

"...It was all too strange and...It reached a point I just decided to act out on my curiosity. So I
followed you that day to the pool. You had said you wanted to swim and look out at girls " He gave him a skeptical look "So I followed you…and then did exactly what we are doing now with Gon and Killua…I observed you from above, from the floors that circle the pool…used zetsu…"

There was a silence. Leorio avoided his stare processing.

"…And Killu-"

"Killua did feel someone was there, but I guess he thought I was a random guard since I didn't radiate anything threatening" 

Leorio kept silent, trying to process the new information.

"…then you heard" Leorio said weary

"Yes… "

-Kurapica was facing him, with a deep gaze focused on him.

"But let me be clear… I really don't understand what is going on because there is information missing… What I concluded was that something happened to Killua, something he wasn't willing to share… Something that is not my business…and that I heard you promising not to tell anybody. "

There was a defining silence as those last words settled in the table. The sky outside was darkening by the minute. Had the last sounded like an accusation?

"Well yes, I did" He raised his head in defiance. He'd given his word to Killua that he'd keep silent, and he would do it again. Along with anything to help him. Leorio looked up angry "And so I did Kurapica, I made a promise. What is your excuse on not telling me you already knew? Keep me acting like an idiot?"

Kurapica held his gaze steady. But on that never ending analyzing gaze flashed a hint of admiration.

"I regret not coming to you before. I… wanted to know what you would do… Killua had just told you his life wasn't threatened anymore. And, some sort of ill pride took the best of me." He said without flinching. "I wanted to know if you would tell me. Because... well...you hadn't told me for starters his life had been threatened… and well, you tell me everything" Kurapica tilted his head looking at the doctor.

He reckoned the unspoken agreement between them shamelessly. How that part of their relationship had always been one-sided. The telling everything…

"When I came back from the pool you acted as if nothing…” The doctor trailed. He looked at the blond. He'd always respected Kurapica secretiveness. It'd never been the other way round between them.

"Oh you must have thought it was amusing at the moment" Leorio put his glass on the table a little more hard than necessary "keeping me alone with this for all these days, no? Do you know how it's been to feel alone helping him? How it was to contain Killua in a breakdown in there alone! He was…- and I couldn't" he breathed

"I'm sorry..." Kurapica whispered

"No, you don't know! I was on the verge of killing him, did you know that? A Zoldick body is that immune to everything that medicating them is always injecting them in the brink between their
unresponding bodies and a lethal overdose! He should have died with what I gave him but he wasn't responding to the shots, did you know that too?"

"No… I didn't"

"Gon would be happy to see how I kill his best friend no?" he yelled "you would be spared of the responsibility anyways"

"I…"

"Everyday fare he said as if it was a joke, another friend to die on me, another friend to die on us, no? I'm finally in a position to help a friend, but I can't! Again I CAN'T! And for what! For Killua to come up to haunt me in my sleep! "He protested.

"Come…up?"

"Why sure, he would be in hell that daredevil" he snarled. "And don't sidetrack me"

"I didn't… I just"

"No. You don't know Kurapica. You don't know how I didn't know what the hell to do. He could not breathe! No, you don't know!" he glared "how can I trust you again!"

"I'm sorry, I really am," Kurapica raised his hands "I just… at first, I had to know if you would, ah you know me, I'm secretly a jerk" He conceded sincere "I really am sorry" Kind eyes sought him with urgency "but Leorio, you need to know… afterwards I could not approach you for real. The next day I noticed" he lowered his voice "that we were being watched"

His eyes however did not lower their steady gaze.

"What…?"

"It's been extremely subtle. But I'm good at tracking. Although I haven't seen him, I could tell someone was watching Killua's every move."

"What?"

"Since the day I accompanied Gon to the wolves' island, we've been watched without interruption….."

There was a dead-end silence.

"And now…?" Leorio whispered, as he looked everywhere

"We've been watched until today."

Leorio arched his eyebrows confused.

"This day, it's gone, I don't know where our stalker went, but he's just not here". His silken voice trailed. "That doesn't mean thought that it's over"

"But what does it mean?"

"I don't know…"

The doctor assimilated the information. His gaze immediately searched for the boys in the deck.
Right now, they were letting the seagulls free. It was a beautiful image…

Kurapica gazed him with worried eyes from the windowpane's reflection.

"Leorio, I'm sorry, truly, that I did not tell you before…I…." He exhaled. And looked up

"If it means anything, I admire you…” He paused to ensure the truth delicately "You were like a father with him…” "The blue eyes beheld him.

Leorio found himself breathing that in...

But then he shook his head.

"… No… Maybe I shouldn't have withheld this… but I really feared that if I told anyone, the consequences would be suffered by him and... I don't even actually know what is really going on… You say we've been followed. Maybe it was someone of his family…"

"I would have recognized it, I'm sure"

"Could it be that maybe that day at the pool, he lied? Maybe he is still threatened-maybe that is why now in the room his reaction-"

"He hasn't told you anything more?"

"Nothing. He has never told me anything. Me finding out in the first place, how hurt he was, that was an accident"

Leorio rested his elbows widespread in the table, tired "he's not any worse than what a battle could do. And we've had trackers before, I mean, let's face it, we've been chased by spiders haven't we?" Leorio let out a nervous laughter… and stopped. "...What worries me is his silence, his avoidance, the lies, Gon doesn't even know- he's still so young… -And my friend"

Kurapica assented in comprehension.

"In the room Kurapica…I think I'd never seen him that" he couldn't find the word.

" ….. Not even in the last hunter exam, with his…"

"Oh yes... with his brother. Eerie man"

"Yes! Thank you. Well, if that was hard to watch, this was a million times worse. Because until those moments you forget he is just a normal kid…” he exhaled "he must have remembered something-I'm sure, because he could not breathe and…well… you heard"

Weirdly, a bit of relief reached up his chest. He realized he’d blown out his stress on the poor blond in front… but he felt so young to feel that responsible. Now he was no longer alone at the problem, they would get Killua out of this soon. The burden of such responsibility – of not being able to help the younger one...

It had been a tourniquet twisting his guts.

"I want to help" Kurapica echoed his thoughts

"Me too! But how do we do it?"

Kurapica remained silent.
"Gon doesn't know? Anything?"

"He is particularly emphatic about that...How weird is that? It's Gon! His number one friend!"

"It's really unusual yes" ...

The blond rested his chin on his elegantly crossed hands.

"What did you see... that day, on Killua" He spoke cautiously. Not knowing yet if he deserved to be included in that information. Leorio however didn't notice his precaution, as he straightened. He felt like a doctor again.

"He was hurt badly" he replied in a murmur... and exhaled for the recount massaging his temples "he had multiple bruises and two long superficial cuts. He had a deep gash on his hip that cleanly reached his hip bone...it actually dented it...and he had a dislocated and broken wrist..."

Kurapica cringed shocked with unbelieving eyes. For a second losing his careful composure.

Leorio nodded. Kurapica blinked

"Who could do that to Killua?"

"Beats me" Leorio shrugged helplessly.

The blond drank from his glass and rationalized the new information. He sighed forming in front of his eyes plausible explanations "...A first impression does sound like his family doings... doesn't it? Or as picturesque as the Zoldycks could get...I mean, it probably is the torture like treatment he received before. But I haven't seen any of the members on board. So it can't be that" He discarded "The second most obvious guess is someone looking for revenge, there must be many people...After all, he was a killer..."

"Yes...I had evaluated those theories too. Particularly the one about revenge."

"It must have been a powerful opponent"

"Or he let it happen at will"

"Maybe that's why he doesn't want Gon to know?"

Leorio nodded "maybe he did something terrible in his past" he sighed. "We as adults know he couldn't help it, but he must feel ashamed"

Kurapica trailed. "But then... maybe it's his business if he doesn't want to tell Gon or us for that matter I guess..."

"But Kurapica, as you said before, this involves us the moment we learn his life was threatened- the moment we see him not fending off well like that...I won't stand and watch as he breaks into another of the nightmares Gon describes-that nightmares that I'm now positive have to do with that someone following him.. Even if he is ashamed of his past and wants to take the brunt of revenge alone, we have to help- because what bothers me is the fact that the one tracking couldn't have vanished into the air... I mean... we are in the middle of the sea no?"

Kurapica smiled with certain fondness.

The doctor looked up "Kurapica, I’m worried. I don't know how to explain this because it's a subjective impression but while I treated him..." Leorio trailed.
He remembered that detached face. And then he'd been pushed faraway, the alcohol spilling, his claw ready, his chest hitching, his eyes shut tight as he'd backed and closed on himself and stopped breathing altogether.

All his fatherly instincts arose as if he wasn't twenty "why is he so… vulnerable? You heard Kurapica… Suddenly he was not responding… "Leorio passed his hand again through his scalp "Now how many times has he been in battles and hospitals and out again with never once having responded the way he did now? It's as if he's been through hell or something, and let's face it, being a Zoldick I just can´t imagine what could be Killua's hell"

"Gon being threatened."

"Uh?"

"I... the reason, behind his ambiguous words, why he is so compromised… I believe he wouldn't have been that harmed if he really cared only for himself at the moment of… whatever that happened to him..." He added quickly "Well, I believe he is defending something... or someone else. Maybe even us. But my hypothesis is that Gon is threatened too" Kurapica said seriously.

Leorio's eyes widened.

"I need to lower your fever...please"

"Leave me alone, Leorio" threatening eyes.

"Killua...I'm...scared to do so. Your fever- you need help..."

"You...don't understand...You don't need to be involved" his voice somehow pleaded.

"But I'm already involved"

"No"

He hadn't taken that into consideration. Not once. He suddenly rose, the instinct of being near the boys again. He looked at the window. They were... upside down hanging from the rail... Gon was trying to reach for the water.

Leorio sat again.

"I'm such a fool! I did not think of that! We have to end this situation now- We have to talk to him!"

"But what if he's actually threatened? As he let you know under the fever and drugs? And then later denied it? For everyone's safety" Kurapica questioned

"Then he has to tell us!"

"And the one watching us will know and hurt Gon"

"You're just speculating! Uber-speculating!"

"It's true, I am."

"He is just thirteen!" exasperation filled Leorio's voice. "God knows I was just a dumb kid watching TV at his age! He shouldn't be trying to save the world"

"And maybe we are just making a fuss out of nothing"
"But we have been followed"

"The one being followed has been specifically Killua… right after the day he was…threatened."

Leorio looked at the boys again.

Suddenly the bartender arrived to take away their empty glasses. He received an absent minded look, and an unfriendly stare. He left quickly, not bothering to ask if they wanted a refill, trying to save his tip.

"We just need to confront him"

"Leorio, I'm afraid that he's being watched or too compromised for even to speak inside the ship about it. Someone being threatened, that slipped of his cover when in fever, might lie and say its all fine the next day. I know I would, were I in that situation"

"I want to-"

"If the vigilance really stops-and I'm taking of a longer than one day break-, then, we'll immediately confront him. But if it resumes, then the only thing we can do is get off this ship in the next port." Kurapica assured "Remember and Killua is an excellent hunter himself" he opened his hands "...and maybe it's all nothing"

"But it is possible…It was weird enough that Killua had told me he'd called his family. He won't even call them for birthdays, or deathly missions for that matter..."

"We just have to wait, and protect our friends as much as we can." Kurapica spoke objectively "If the vigilance resumes, we'll watch them as well 24/7" he tried to reassure the defeated look on Leorio's face.

"..Ok…" that did sound like a plan. Kurapica took his glass to sip the last when the doctor raised his head.

"Kurapica… there's something else..."

The blond nodded.

But the doctor couldn't find the words to follow.

It was dark and quiet. Gon slept by his side. Peaceful… drooling a little. Slender tanned arms sunk in between pillows in the middle of that foggy foggy night.

When would that fog dissipate for Ging's sake? The screen reflected his concentrated look... as he devised and programmed through his laptop as silent as he could. Killua finally left the mp3 live-emitting strategically near the receiver on the pc, so that this one would catch the music and resend it to the device attached behind Killua's ears. After leaving everything ready, he scooched into the blankets again.

Oh he felt the need to sleep painfully on his eyelids. He would drift in the midst of music and wake himself, pieces of lyrics mingling with vivid dreams and the room around him. A strong déjà to it all... As always he could not let himself miss the time… But...

He…he felt Gon near him, his warmth… the boy was a damn human hottie, he thought sleepily.

A cell phone message pulled him upright.
I'm waiting.

He repressed the internal cringe. Instantly other one arrived.

Don't go out the door. Leave your room through the window.

His heart did a small arrhythmia dance at this. He was already out of the bed. Carefully he took the one remaining bandage away. Soundlessly he went throughout the windows of the room to the deck.

Kurapica, on guard at the moment, heard nothing.

"there's something else…" Leorio looked outside. The last bits of evening greyed away into the darkness.

The blond nodded. The doctor was deeply troubled… he seemed even more so, even though they'd just settled evenly the subject. Had it to do with something else?

"What is it?"

"I…ok….er…"

But he didn't elaborate further; he just folded his napkin over and over.

"Has it to do with the spider?"

Uh? "No, its Killua… why?" Leorio was startled a second

"Oh, no, just asking..." when over thinking betrayed him...

"Kurapica… are you" Leorio said slightly vexed

"No no, I swear… its vacations. U-huh" he said like repeating a known line.

"Then why did you bring it up?"

"I can't help it. You know it well. I don't have to excuse myself to you anyways. "

Leorio sighed smiling at his pride even before he was finished. "If I didn't know you so well…"

Kurapica didn't lift his sight from his own glass, but slumped a little

"Sorry…” his defensive demeanor dropped. He paused "so…?"

"So…"

Leorio didn't know how to follow.

"It's about Killua then" His friend tried to bring him back. But Leorio only nodded, missing the cues to proceed intentionally. He really was lost as to how exactly approach…

Kurapica frowned now impatient.

"Is it that…. bad?"

"No it's nothing, it's just…"
"Killua…he told you something else?"

"No…” He remained silent. But he pushed his glasses up the ridge of his nose, before exhaling. "But something made me think…But I must be wrong, I mean…it's probably nothing" Kurapica assented. Leorio sighed, his eyes fixed on Killua laughing faraway. "You know…when I inspected him…he had this cut…It went from his navel to the hem of his pants..."

Kurapica averted his glance "that is sick."

"… He had a similar cut on his back"

"He did" Kurapica half questioned, more brooding to himself… "I guess that does sustain with the theory of someone's revenge…"

Leorio tried to find the words, to follow cautiously … he had not even dared to verbalize his apprehension…telling them gave them some truth he dreaded.

"Kurapica…"

"There's more"

Leorio proceeded slowly.

"… Today I had to re-examine that first cut on his front…and then he had the breakdown... but right before I was able to see for some seconds…just before his breakdown…I saw he… on his lower belly, under the waist band. I could swear he… he had a… hickey"

"...What?"

"A hickey…"

"A what? A hickey, a hickey as in a-

"What you heard…"

"Where"

"…"

Leorio closed his eyes wearily...

"Under the hem of his pants. Near where the cut ended..." The silence was awful. The apalling cessation of sounds took the air out of his lungs. "You don't" Kurapica whispered. "You don't think"

"I don't know"

"H-he's he's just thirteen"

"…I know" he whispered

Silence...Kurapica unconsciously had covered his mouth. "I might be wrong, because he was so bruised up…” Leorio added.

"Are you sure or not?!" Kurapica let out exasperated.

"I don't know!"
"But you saw it"
Leorio lowered his gaze. He had seen that. Among then million signs in Killua's behavior. He kept silent.

"Fuck" Kurapica rose. He looked at the kids again. He shook his head denying. Killua was there, skating, teaching his friend like a small gangster…

"We... no... That can't be right... he can't..." he shook his head as if contrasting many theories in his head.

Killua and Gon were laughing.

Kurapica averted his glance trying to think, startled.

"No..." He sat again, closed up. Leorio felt his words were becoming real. Had he spoken them? No he had to misinterpret when he saw that...

"Then...then this might be a totally different situation." Kurapica murmured mildly aghast. He looked at the doctor.

"let's get off this ship right now" he whispered.

Leorio was taken off guard. He suddenly snapped stressed.

"You think I haven't thought of that? Now you're telling me this? Out of the ship? And where uh! We're in the middle of the freaking ocean! What about the "everything is going to be alright" and "we'll keep an eye" on them! We can't just get off the ship!"

Kurapica wasn't calm anymore, he was determining something that maybe hadn't happened, shouldn't and couldn't- he wanted desperately to believe he was wrong, and so he probably was… yeah that was it. cause it had been for just a second, a fleeting second in which his heart sank and then the alcohol spilled and he could have sworn... tiny red dots, little broken vessels inside the dark dark bruise, the bite on the pale skin…

Kurapica stared fixedly at the window.

"It's no time to argue. But if you need to know my reasons…I- These kids have received death threats, beatings and stuff before. I'm calm with that. But not-not this. I trust Killua is not going to end up dead. But I don't want anyone to mess around with his….his well being, his right to…"

somehow, for the first time, he couldn't follow. But he rose from his chair.

"We are leaving"

"We can?"

"We are hunters. We'll make someone bring a sailboat, or a jet and we're leaving. Whatever there's available. We're getting out of here now. We'll say the reason was the spiders" he paused and regrettably looked up "...which isn't entirely false"

Leorio just looked at the table and dismissed the last. He asked wearily

"Can we do all that?"

"I don't know. But right now we start to watch them 24 /7 as we agreed. And whoever did something will be found out and will pay. And we will know what happened".
"Come near"

He stood in the door feeling hesitant. He gave a step forward and heard how it echoed in the room. The door swung slowly to place at his back. It was difficult avoiding the dread of feeling trapped… Illumi sat at his desk dealing with black money and Zoldick business. But he raised his head again. He took with indecipherable eyes the seven year old boy by the door.

"Closer"

The sharp monotone he automatically obeyed. Always. Even though Illumi's hand gestured the place right next to him with an impassive stare. He was there.

The small boy looked up with a shy expression. But his brother hadn't lingered on his presence any further now that he stood where he should.

He looked around timidly, while shifting his weight. He'd never been inside many of the rooms of the Zoldick mansion. Illumi's private room was one. Now, when he was on his own he would scout around the place happily, but he wouldn't dream of coming anywhere near here, Noooo. Now he observed…

As if apprehending the smallest detail would help him in whatever was to come.

*His* room was dark… and unnaturally plain. A trained eye wouldn't be able to tell much of *his* likes, eerily bare and dim lit as it stood. There was only one plausible exit, through which he had just walked in. The windows were narrow and high above as if a dungeon- he noted. So he found himself unconsciously searching for shackles… because this was supposed to be training…no?

"Killua"

He looked up immediately. And met those dark expressionless eyes. They were staring... swallowing every bit of him...

"How have you been doing" the paused monotone echoed softly through the room. Illumi had turned to address insignificant him with that silken emotionless voice.

"Good" he barely spoke. The silence swallowed his words.

Illumi beheld him, with uncanny dark eyes…they revealed nothing of the intentions behind. It scared him so.

"How has training gone in my absence Killua?"

"…good…” a thread of a voice as he lowered his eyes. He couldn't help wondering if he'd been summoned because of his electricity problem…

But then Illumi raised one of his hands, an extended finger, to his forehead. He froze. With a cold touch he caressed a silver strand of hair away.

Oh, that one gesture turned his blood to ice…

"Have you enjoyed your free time?"

The boy nodded shyly. He had.

"Really? With your friends?"
Ice. On his veins ran ice.

He felt the cold hand to his shoulder

"Little brother, its fine" he spoke in a supple monotone, as he observed him. "Speak with the truth. Have you got any friends? Do tell" he commanded softly.

The boy swallowed hard.

His chin was softly taken. And he was forced to look up with just that delicate gesture. With alarm the seven year old immediately searched for a single trace of the misconstrued intentions behind. He only found the same impassive mask that did not lit an ounce of emotion. It stole his breath. Courage brought it back. Well, the midget version of it.

"N-no"

Those black eyes and he became conscious of the fear that beat inside his chest in a steadily rising pace -fear…fear…fear…fear…fear…

But then Illumi curved slightly up the line of his mouth. "You are right brother. You have spoken the truth." He paused "You should always be rewarded for speaking the truth" he murmured softly.

Killua's eyes widened in confusion. Illumi observed him intently.

"Here Killua is your reward" The elder looked at him blankly, as he handed him a box that was over his desk. Killua held it in his hands unsure. He was small but this was no good. He looked up for further instructions.

"Open it"

He didn't want to. But he obeyed.

Inside there was a small… skull.

That of an animal.

That of a squirrel.

... 

He took the small cranium between his hands realizing they were slightly shaking. It was…it was…

"Your hands Killu. Control them" Illumi spoke softly. But he had there… in his ha-

"Killua"

At once he forced himself to divert his attention. This was training-this was training-

"You were speaking the truth brother, you are very wise" Illumi replied softly as he raised his chin yet again, wanting to see the boy's eyes.

"You no longer have friends"

The boy closed his eyes as his thought began to run scattered and wild. Illumi …spoke the truth...
Dark long hair brushed his shoulder, and suddenly Illumi was at his ear. "I care for you" He murmured, in the unchanging soft monotone, as the boy's eyes widened.

"Friends have the power to hurt you little brother. I'll always eliminate anything that might hurt you" he said softly. A vice painful grip held his shoulder tightly.

Killua closed his eyes. He tried to remember nanny's words now.

"Killua"

He opened them unwantingly.

"You are a Zoldick Killua. A permanent dweller of the night..." he said impassive "That cannot be changed. Do you want the family to consider you part of their own?" His dark eyes beheld him as his soft monotone dripped words.

"Y-yes!" He let out desperately- what was the elder thinking! Would they abandon him? If he failed? He hadn't got any other family, he hadn't, he hadn't- he wouldn't fail- he wouldn't-

"Then you have to obey everything father and I say. Do you understand?"

He instantly nodded. He would obey. He would be better next time. He wouldn't fail.

"Breathe" the dark eyes beheld him.

He inhaled obeying- Moments ago he'd stopped breathing altogether.

"Breathe again" the elder said like repeating a known line…

Killua nodded. He swallowed dry. His hands still shook.

"You are small. But you have to understand that. Will you obey everything I command you?"

He nodded emphatically again. But Illumi stared at him with vortex eyes.

"When you're older you can question the why of every action. Now you just have to obey what father and I say. Like this you will be fine brother. Do you understand?"

He nodded unable to speak.

"If I order you to train, will you?"

He nodded

"If I order you to put the shackles on, will you?"

He nodded again

"Really?" Illumi mused softly "and if I order you to sing?"

He assented once more.

Illumi beheld him. In deep silence. As if he was musing.

"Sing"

Killua's silence matched his questioning child eyes, he'd heard wrong.
"This is an order Killua. Sing" he spoke his gaping silence; Illumi raised a disappointed eyebrow
"You were singing today in the garden. Sing now. I want to hear you"

Killua closed his eyes and swallowed.

And he began singing, barely, his voice almost a faint whisper. As he finished one line, Illumi lifted
his chin. There was something in his eyes…

"Take your shirt off" he whispered.

Killua assented relieved. This was a more familiar part of the usual training, now came the shackles...
When it pooled at his feet he discovered Illumi, with impossibly cold eyes, held a candle.

Slowly, the elder tilted it over his shoulder, staring fixedly at the violet questioning orbs. The hot
melting wax fell droplet by droplet over his collarbone.

Killua nodded, the pattern of work was recognizable, and so he could handle it. He lulled himself the
pain away, controlling his breathing strictly as he inhaled and exhaled slowly. Just as they had taught
him… Soon, the increasing patches of skin burnt were no longer a problem in his mind.

"Very well Killua. Very well indeed" Illumi observed.

Just then a sound distracted them both.

Milluki’s white cat stared at them from the window. He paused inspecting and sniffing the air before
plopping into the floor.

"Bring here the cat Killua" he murmured monotonely.

The small albino looked up with questioning eyes.

"Bring here the cat. In your arms" he paused each word, as if trying to make himself clear. But the
small boy seemed hesitant.

"Killua"

He took a step forward. Feeling his dark presence enveloping him, his heart thudding painfully
because this couldn't bring any good. The cat stood there staring at him. He'd petted the animal
thousands of times.

"Good"

There he stood, the snowy cat in his arms snuggling. Illumi, with a cold hand softly caressed the
white fur. Killua repressed a shiver. He suddenly shook his head.

"Illumi, no… I don't want to..." he tried desperately.

Illumi smirked… for the first time, with a certain evil to his black diamond orbs.

"You can't finish your own line, little brother" he said in the soft monotone. Killua gaped unable to
reply.
"you don't want to kill this cat Killua? Interesting... this is revealing. Little brother, you shouldn't
evidence the care… but" he mused "haven't you slain many others before?" he extended an
explaining hand.

th-those were targets- those were preys-
Illumi sighed softly, observing his silence.

"I agree though that Milluki wouldn't like it if we killed this cat, would he..." the dark orbs looked up.

"So break his tail Killua"

Killua eyes rested on the floor, feeling the warmth in his arms, the light weight of the cat. He was paralyzed.

Illumi softly took the skull that lay in the corner of his desk. He took it between his hands. It once had flesh over the now smooth bone. It once had eyes that were hazel colored...

But Killua that is what happens always with each of the ones you slay...

"You haven't stopped trembling since you came in here little brother. Are you cold..." he spoke softly... a hand to his shoulder again to hold him. The other one holding the skull.

Killua bit his inner cheek as he softly placed the cat in Illumi's desk. The pet's life had been spared... The cat stared mildly curious.

"Break his tail Killua"

Illumi met the wide violet eyes in his round pale face. He was so small. And his violet eyes oh, they were detached, that was what he wanted to see...

His hand did not shake. The movement was quick, even the cat didn't see it coming. Only the horrible wail was heard, the bent tail, red drops and a white blur to disappearance.

The boy's face...it was expressionless... his gaze empty, his hand extended. Only his eyes rose to meet Illumi's... for further commands.

The curve of his lip sent a shiver down his spine.

"Very well Killua" Illumi observed. And he couldn't help it...imagining it was some kind of praise, he finally did something good...

"Now drink this"

He assented. This was probably a test of poison resistance. He took the cup. The unfamiliar scent warned him of how he was being tested with something new. He took a sip

"All of it"

He nodded. And he drank. And drank.

"You are doing very well Killua"

He suddenly felt the world spin. He took hold of the desk.

"Do not lean on the desk Killua, you do not need the help"

He nodded following the command. Even though all became fuzzy and off its hinges.

He heard the fumbling of a belt and wondered if now lashing began. He wondered if nanny would be sad, would he disappoint her. Their friend was dead. All because of him... their friend was dead, dead, dead, dead-
"Very well Killua. Now, on your knees brother" A hand to his shoulder was pushing him down. He knelt.

Nanny carried a bundle of clean clothing as she hummed. She entered through the door synchronizing the opening with the maneuver of carrying the tall and neatly folded stack when he spotted the seven year old albino. He was knelt in a corner of the room. As she came near she saw he had by his side a glass of water. And with a finger dipped wet he was doing something to the wall… which seemed to be...

...Poking the electric socket.

"KILLUA!"

She dropped the clothes and yanked him away.

Catlike, his hair almost rose as he looked up alarmed. He mouthed out of breath "Nanny"

"You should never do that!" she almost yelled, scared herself. She rubbed the boy's shoulders unconsciously, as if to make sure he was ok. She exhaled "little master you could be electrocuted like that!"She shook her head "god, maybe you didn't know it was dangerous-but-what were you doing? You should know you don't play with electric sockets! You just don't! "

Killua lost his gaze in the carpet at his feet.

"I…" but he didn't proceed. He just looked at nanny with apologizing terrified eyes.

Nanny exhaled.

And looked at him and rolled her eyes affectionately. She gracefully sat Indian style, and patted the floor at his front for him to seat in a resolute gesture. The silver haired boy sat shyly.

"Little master, what were you doing with that glass of water?" she asked gently

"I…” he looked down. But nanny waited kindly on his silence. Until Killua exhaled and trailed... "I wanted to get better nanny". His voice came out somewhat detached. His eyes however... they did not raise their gaze, as if...ashamed? her heart leaped.

"Better?"

His gaze was empty… "With electricity… I'm…no good" he whispered. "that is why..." he trailed. He didn't understand her expression but her eyes had suddenly saddened. He wondered if he'd disappointed her with that too. He felt her hand through his hair and leaned against that.

There was a silence.

Nanny closed her eyes. The challenge the whole situation poised her to raising this boy; it was sometimes terrible to think. Terrible to act out, to watch and abide, without being able to help. Always one step from tripping down in the attempt of their mutual survival in this confinement…

But she exhaled. Other times… she had to keep remembering- other times, like when they sang or played…they were truly happy. She looked with confidence into those wondering violet eyes because he would need that.

She smiled warmly "don't you agree training is so, so hard?" a conversational tone through kind eyes.
Killua looked befuddled.

"...yes..." his child voice echoed in the silence. He looked up with questioning eyes.

The twenty year old girl smiled sadly "to become your nanny I had to train too. It probably wasn't as hard as your training is though!" she endorsed emphatically, and sighed "...And yet it was already too hard for me..." she cupped his cheek

"Really?"

"Yup!" she sighed "Terrible!" she gazed into those perfect child eyes with gentleness. Her voice grew softer.

"Little master, you don't have to visit on your own those awful hours, leave them for when training is really taking place."

"But..."

"Whatever they make you feel" her voice came out lacking air. But he looked up at that. "you already exceed all expectations, you're like a shining star my boy" she whispered "Please...promise me you won't train on your own..."

The little albino lowered his eyes. Slowly he nodded.

"In time you'll see you'll overcome everything" she said with confidence.

The boy shook his head, not meeting her gaze

"I'm... not strong enough"

"Yes you are"

No...For them, no... "...I'm ...so...tired" the boy whispered. His shoulders were taken.

"Trust me! You will always overcome everything" She said confident.

"I don't know" he shook his head.

"Oh, you don't need to know, I know it for you. You just trust me. Whenever you feel something get's particularly hard, you just remember this words and trust me I'm right. You will overcome everything my little master"

Her words as strong as the roots of an old oak tree…

On years to come he learned that she wasn't right. He wouldn't have managed to overcome everything on his own like that. It was when he'd absorbed her words that he was able. The moment she spoke them he was able…

Even afterwards…when he was taken all recollection of the closest thing he had to the smell, the words, the eyes, the voice.. of a true mother.

All was eerily dark in the ship. He was returning from the pool showers in a new set of PJ's. He felt a bothering pain, but not something that was incapacitating as the other night.

But he detoured himself from the halls to the deck...to the night... to the known rail...
That metal rail, the only limit between him and the ocean.

He let himself fall to his knees. Then to his side.
Much better, nightly wonderer.
On his back he stared at the dark sky.

He did not remember much. Even though just one hour before he'd been in the exact position with someone above him, he thought indifferently. With an impersonal mindset he tried to collect what had just happened to him to see if he'd said anything compromising.

The door had been opened.

He'd been pushed to the bed.

Illumi hovered over him. Did he play with him or not? He could not tell, he was positive he'd forced himself to be somewhere else along the music… Illumi was being moderate on his treatment, scared of being found, uh?

He raised his eyebrow wearily. The moon stared above.

His brother still had…. caressed were he'd always caressed, had bit on the same spots he used to bite, like his neck and waist…While Killua had stared at the ceiling just bored- while he observed from afar how his body was touched- while it was firmly kept in place so as to allow … He sighed. He'd been first prepared. Fact spoke he always had been under Illumi's sick games when he was smaller. Never had he been so violently- he bit his lip- taken, no, until the particular night from one week ago-.the bastard- that bastard why put them both through the mtf pain? He moved his head to one side, tossing away his thoughts. Facts burned to his mind revisited with more speed than necessary because, yes, he'd hissed and closed his fists and shut tight his eyes, and maybe he screamed-or not- he wasn't sure- he hadn't heard himself, he'd only heard his panting at his neck- he'd been taunted, Gon's name had appeared again, as he'd been hit against the bed, hips pushed strongly against another bones and...And... he closed his eyes, weary.

As if he was another being different from the rag doll left there...his skin rubbed against another skin... foreign sweat sticking to his own...But, no, he did not listen, quite dead.
And he hadn't said a word.

It had finally been just sex… that's all.

He stared at the slowly clearing skies... the moon shining brightly, ironic, mocking..
The image was printed there...traces… trails of everything just done had marked the sheets and his body.

… His trails…

… And…-detachedly he thought—… His own ones..."You'll pretend you are indifferent to me?" his dark laughter

He shut tight his eyes.
Nails sunk to his shoulder as he felt sick.

No…

He exhaled slowly. He would not let this reach him. That would lead him nowhere…

He was so tired…His cheek against the floor. Silence, pure white silence blanketing his shoulders, his spine, his cold feet, he was motionless. The minutes were posed against the ground like specks of
dust. The light, it was faint… it had a glow of its own that slowly fell against his limbs. The cold floor against his body… it was soothing. Enjoying the silence, about to fall into nothingness. Empty.

As minutes went by, he wearily did a vain effort to keep himself from drifting: he thought how he had gotten there… how he had fallen here… Immobile as he was; his fingers became aware of the floorboards against them, in motionless seeking for the primary reason of a state. His.

But soothingly… instead… slumber shyly interrupted the silence with its own humming. It was the song Gon had been singing today… A song like a lost tune in his head. It did remind him that he would soon pick himself up from the floor boards and carry himself somewhere. He closed his eyes to the soft pacing of the tune, falling softly drop by drop over his mind, before he woke up…

… That would be the only sign for an outsider to realize he was still alive. His breathing. Sprawled as he was. Frozen still as he was. But yes… He… was still alive. He would be able… he … would overcome this as well… he would… he would… he would…

He walked back to their room. Vaguely he wondered about the reason of the window precaution… Did Illumi know he’d been discovered by his doctor friend? Dark thoughts invaded Killua’s mind as he walked through the night back.

He opened the window to their room and entered silently.

And his heart stopped.

Gon, awake, sat on the bed staring at him.

"Killua, where were you?!!"

Chapter End Notes

A/N: Poll: how many of you want to see Killua drunk?

Please review! I want your feedback on how I can be a better writer…

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He was sure hidden. He checked to his left and right, with the chocorobots in his hands. He was completely alone! And with his new booty treasure: the stolen chocolate from the kitchen. And- and the pretty coins- the ones he'd found in the grass and the soda can taps. Those chocorobots would shoot anyone that came nearby.

He calculated swiftly. He would now conquer the bed area with the dinosaurs help raawwwrr- Someone grabs his ankle and takes him from under the bed. His heart races. He doesn't want to leave his hiding place, he's clutching to the wooden boards on the floor as he can.

He is dragged out. One of the two chocorobot is left behind, no! he wanted one in each hand. But he's now being turned by his shoulders; the chocorobot is way out of his reach.

There stands his big brother.

Tall tall up.

Black black eyes.

He fidgets, foot to foot, has he done something wrong?- has he- has he-has he- His cheek is caressed softly. He tries to runay-it's not training time; it's his recess, his recess he protests he runs- he's slapped hard. The sting reaches his eyes. He seeks the training mindset they taught him. Not to cry. Illumi pets his cheek, then his body all over-all over- saying confusing words. What has he done wrong? He races thinking, his heart thumping strongly, Illumi kneels holding him.

He remembers he has stolen chocolate from the kitchen, and he begs for forgiveness. But his body is being roasted by spider-like hands, so cold. He stays still. He gets bored. He wants Illumi's huffing and caressing to be over, so he can play again. But he won't tell him he is because it's another game, a training game, a darker game... easier ...stranger - he won't drop the chocorobot still dangling from his hand. Just in case.

Illumi notices this. The powerful dead blank look he fears, the pang of fright and the toy is torn out of his hands. A small voice yells not to and begs, but the chocorobot is tossed away with strength... It hits the wall heavily, and snaps in two. The image is burnt to his mind.

"My choco-roooooboooot my.. my... my-" a fist connects to his jaw that sends him tumbling to the bed. He stops instantly his sobbing and wide eyed he stares in fear. Illumi approaches him. Holds him. Seeks him under his shirt, whispers, trails a kiss, a kiss is good, but he whispers and he shivers- little brother, why don't you still get broken here inside, they won't save you, your toys, no one will, the roaming and his touching himself, and Killua stays quiet like a good boy. His brother is over him, he is suffocating him, he seems to have trouble breathing, his shirt is off and Killua you're mine but those eyes are still yours they won't die, won't fade in color, why don't you stop playing, why don't you stop laughing, why are you able to sing my Killua when you are still killing every fortnight,he barely breaths and the boy feels weird, why don't you break, he grabs his waist exasperation to his voice -Killua- his shorts down he's pinned firmly against the bed, he won't move
he promises to himself, the elder is pressing his body again and again. Killua doesn't move. Until his brother trembles. He huffs resting over his body where all is sticky. He plays he is a dead body, still as they always are. Big brother gets bored. He tosses him away, he'd done well, closes his belt, whisper the rules, leaves.

Game over.

Door closed

He stays still a few seconds. He cleans his tummy with the bed mattress ew! ew!ew!pee! He pulls up his short hastily, angrily. Then he runs swift down his bed, and retrieves the other chocorobot. He is curled like cats do, and from his spot he has a view of the broken chocorobot at the far side of the room. He'll now play cat hidden.

Killua blinked.

"I…" he stared struck.

He'd just entered through the window his thoughts somewhere else. And his heart had leaped. Gon was awake, sitting on his bed and staring at him.

"Where where you?!!"

He hadn't a back plan for this - Gon-was.awake. Dude. Gon was- He blinked again.

"I was worried!" Gon yelled and Killua jumped startled. "Why weren't you here? And why did you enter by the window?" And why is your hair... is your hair wet?" He pointed the albino dripping strands.

Killua stared agape for a moment.

Then the albino shook his head.

"I'm sorry to wake you..." He raised his hands with the poker face set-Oh and there it was the hoarse voice, as if he'd just left a heavy metal concert. He cleared his throat with funny noises.

"sorry"

"...Don't be, I just... well I was worried!" The raven frowned. His caramel eyes brimmed in anxiety...And the albino noted detachedly how this was cute. He felt a small chuckle at the base of his sore throat. It all seemed so unreal.

Gon furrowed his brow.

"Killua, I really was. You were out in the middle of the night! For ages! I was worried sick" He said irritated, still expecting the expected explanation.

"You make it sound like such a big deal Mito" he said with a bored expression.

"Stop it. Don't mock me!"

"Sorry, sorry. So I was out. What's the big deal?" he waved annoyed.

"I thought that you'd run away or something" Gon snapped.
The albino heard his own discrete peal of laughter and an unexpected patronizing tone "…why would I Gon? And to where exactly? Ah? -"

"You've done it before" He cut in his sentence.

There was a dead on silence as the words settled in the space between them.

"…and, well, you tell me where" Gon almost whispered.

His caramel eyes dropped.

Killua eyes flashed. He remained impassive. His gaze averted.

Hollow. A gap hollowed all sound.

The hunter's exam happy ending, the curtains closing to him with… it had never been an issue in their friendship - they never spoke about it as if that whole ordeal hadn't happened in the first place and- and- Gon, he still remembered. He still- his last words-I surrender-the meaning behind them – the murder, the bright red blood, the leaving, leaving Gon behind, his hand sticky-all whirled in milliseconds.

He bit his lip. Feeling removed.

"I have…before…yes..." Killua assented... Eyes absent.

Acknowledging the truth.

"Killu-"

"I had a nightmare. I couldn't sleep, so I went for air outside." The monotone was mechanically untangling a lie that tasted cold on his lips. He guessed the shuffling questions in Gon's eyes "I had nothing to do out there….quite boring…. took a swim, wet my hair. I dried myself and returned here. That's… that's it….. That's all" Killua murmured.

…

"So… no needs for paranoia bro" He tilted a gracious smile and gave his back to the stare, to close the already closed window.

It wasn't that far from the truth, he had nightmares didn't he? And Gon, the thing he'd just thrown-His fault

"Why did you enter by the window?"

Killua looked up bored "…I did not want to wake you.” He trailed, one finger lightly caressing the window’s latch.

"I obviously failed" he returned an ironic smirk. He stared at the window. Somehow the glass echoed the trapped-in feeling.

"You had a nightmare..." the raven trailed.

The albino found himself peeking through the dim reflection in the glass. Gon's expression had changed into something he couldn't read. Well, for starters Gon always knew when he lied and so it was much easier to punch him than to lame his way out. He felt like such a child right now…scared. But... interestingly enough, as this was a half lie it seemed that Gon was actually befuddled
"and so you couldn't sleep?" he said somewhat confused. Killua turned resting his back to the cold glass. He nodded, arms folded over his chest. Gon stared at the young Zoldick. He was locked up.

" … another...why…another?" he trailed to himself.

"Uh?"

Gon kept silent. But then he sighed. Exhaling deeply. As if giving up something. "Are you okay now?"

His eyes in the moon-washed room, well they were like chocolate pools, weren't they? Perfect deep honey then sweetened milk chocolate... Screw them. Screw the entireness of them, oh for all the Viking gods and Satan and Pokemons and swearing stuff, stop staring, oh screw them-

"I'm fine" Killua scratched his ankle with his other foot.

Gon stared at him- he always stared- trying to see past him.

"I am Gon. I'm just bored" Killua rested his back on the wall, hands slipping to his pockets, closing his eyes to the ceiling, cool smile set on his lips. As if he was just shrugging. In fact unable to face him. Unable… That whale- island kid tilting his head -those keen eyes and then himself...Against the dark wall that body. His own. Too perceivable- he'd erase himself against the wall if he could, but the sweat to his palms and neck, the marred angles and used patches, the spent flesh, the exposed skin adhered to the bones all gave him volume and existence and to face him from all– he sensed the build up of some form of exasperation crawling through his muscles like fire ants, just been bit-just been pushed-

He kept his poker face set, as he exhaled, closed eyes. Waiting for his private collaged mind to stop spiralling.

"Is it the monster again?"

He almost burst in laughter and yet the muscles in his face were rigid and hurt. Killua opened his lids to stumble into him. Firesome eyes that would be the word. And he could not hold that look. The albino turned away disinterested scratching again his ankle.

"Mmm"

Flinch. Gon was tugging him from the pajama sleeve.

"Well you look like hell. To bed"

The startling borne from that kind of closeness was fleeting as the albino looked in front. He felt moody. The crumpled sheets. A bed. Again.

Flinch. again. The mind assault scattering the covers for a moment then the wince -and again the image of the now clean crumpled covers- wasn't he becoming used this? To dwelling on that edge- the edge of losing his mind? Then it seemed that all the beds in this devil forsaken ship were the same- And like a wave he felt he loathed everything, everyone, even Gon's proximity- even chocolate.

...He'd gotten used to dealing with that exasperating feeling for a while though. Oh well, he just wanted to be left in peace, alone. He wanted to finish the video game he'd downloaded. Introversion. He closed and opened his fists.
Oh well…

Killua sighed, slumped and stretched. Ok, bed, here we go.

A hand to his shoulder and his dive was interrupted.

"Are you able to sleep now Killua?" caramel eyes sought him across the dark. "If not, you should know I make the best night tea ever. It's an ancient recipe from Los Andes"

"…. where the heck do you learn those stuff Gon"

"Sailors" he shrugged with a smug smile. He probably guessed he hadn't the least clue as to where the hell was Los Andes.

Killua rolled his eyes.

"… You're not sleepy?"

"I don't care. How about you?"

"...that tea wouldn't be a bad idea…” He trailed, abruptly relishing the idea of distraction. Get me out of my mind. He suddenly rose his eyes a sort of cat-like expression "we could try to pass the entire night without sleeping. I bet you can't” He challenged. He liked it, nightmare free style and the thrilling betting the dude and night video combats.

"I bet I can." Gon eyes defied him "You keep me awake half the night so it won't be that a stretch" he smiled

"I do?" the albino asked bewildered

"Ok. What exactly are you doing now?" Gon grinned and watched Killua roll his eyes.

He'd really meant... the nightmares... If he only knew how terrible it was getting to watch him...The albino interrupted his drift

"Well, bummers if I woke you. You chose a nightly creature for a friend"

"But I already have the nightingale. It's just too many" he protested "I'm surrounded!"

"The nightingale is not a night creature" Killua let out defensive

"No? But its name-"

"And I'm sorry to break it to you but that is not a nightingale…the thing should be lectured on proper sizes. It probably is a mistake of evolution, or er, the matrix. More probably some Gin crap"

Gon smacked him in the head as the albino crooked his grin. Gon sighed "Ok Killua. Let's stay up now. But I don't want to keep awake the entire night. I don't want to be useless tomorrow"

"Then make me your Los Andes creepy thing"

"That sounds like an awesauce plan" Gon claimed enthusiastically. "Oh right. I have an idea but... Killua, do you have... err... tea?"

"No"

"And warm water?"
"Not in my pockets last time I checked"

"EXCELLENT!" he chirped truly happy.

"'cause...that's the way the cookie crumbles"

"Killua, I inform you we are obliged to sneak into the kitchens. How awesome is that?!" a tricksy smile caught to Gon's voice...After years he did not feel surprise out of Gon's thought-coherence. "If they catch us, we'll say it was totally for medical therapeutic reasons" he chirped again enthusiastic.

"I'm not in rehab" the albino let out weary.

"Neh, you're just an insomniac last time I checked" The raven commented as he grabbed a dozen blankets.

Stupid dimwit punk.

Killua actually had Leorio's pills but he hadn't told his friend. He hadn't taken them at all, he'd just forgotten, and now... "Ok... so to the kitchens... you're sure? It's not like...illegal right" the albino trailed-

"I'll bring aaall the blankets so we can drink our teas there! Its soo cold anyways. Aren't you cold?"

He actually was, but discretely had refused to acknowledge it for the entire night. He still received a blanket projectile in the time given. Gon's smile shone even in the dark, his eyes so satisfied to have Killua happy with a plan. He was like a dog with a swaying tail.

"So it is settled!" he turned for the door but stopped and directed to the window as if it was the most normal thing. He turned his head with casual stance "Oh, by the way, Killua, why did you lock us in?"

Pause. "I did?"

"Well I couldn't get out. That's why I couldn't come after you when I realized you weren't here. I was too lazy to think of the window he he"

Killua's eyes clouded. He immediately directed to the door and tried it.

It was locked indeed.

His thoughts immediately jumped to Leorio... could he be there across the hall? Or had he locked them for their safety or something? Or to make sure they wouldn't leave. He should have known his performance would bring consequences but–but-but that soon?

And Illumi had known...

He tried the door again, softly, not to make noise. Suddenly he felt distressed. This was all too dangerous. Exposing Gon like that- were they going out of their room? They should be barricaded! Or in a far off island for that matter- Because out there, out there, he'd just returned from – and out there-

He turned off to tell Gon that it was better if they forgot about the tea, that he was sleepy. Only to realize the smaller one was already climbing through the window.

"neh Killua, they'll fix our door tomorrow. Come!"

"Gon wait!" But the window pane swung and closed behind him. The raven was out of reach. Killua cursed and ran to the window to cross it, the need of protecting-of shielding the younger one-
"Wait! Gon" he untangled his limbs from the frame and leapt outside.

"We're ready!"

"Gon I-"

But the raven had leaned happily towards the window to close it

–wait–

"no no NO!"-

the latch clicked. Too late.

Gon turned his head "uh? You spoke?"

But Killua hit his palm to his forehead with violence again and again.

"Killua!"

"That's it. We're locked outside."

"What?"

"We're locked outside our own room."

"What? But how- but you entered-"

"I had left the window open. So when I returned it didn't lock from inside. I didn't even know about the door" he replied bleakly.

"How intellige- wait but… no! It cannot be!" Gon turned to the window and tried to open it. He forced it. In vain.

"NOOOOOOOOO"

Killua was just absent, staring appalled.

Gon raised his fist summoning nen. But he abruptly stopped himself. "Right" he hesitated "We can't afford to break another glass… after the gym we destroyed we don't have like any more money for... decades..." Killua just stared emptily at the room.

Gon took a hand to his chin and thought. And finally shrugged "Neh, Killua, it doesn't matter. It's just today. Let's go to the kitchen and sleep there! and make ourselves a good tea."

He couldn't possibly be talking for real; but Killua nodded slowly, absently.

"Ok!" Gon shrugged. The raven briefly thought about how there was somehow this tacit agreement of not mentioning to bother the guys in the night. They'd never talked about it or assumed anything at all but to look for them in the after hours somehow felt creepy. And both knew it. Gon giggled.

Killua was just processing they were locked outside and how he'd let this happen- or something typical of his brooding mind, the raven thought. Gon once again turned to Killua and tried that thing that didn't seem to bother the albino ….of taking his hand and dragging him forward.

Killua just dawdled along startled.
The fact was that as the windows closed, he had hit rock hard with a truth.

He'd been selfish.

He didn't realize Gon had grabbed his arm to pull him through the labyrinths of that huge ship. The collision had left him stunned: He'd been fucking selfish. This whole time. Since Brother came, all this time he'd been-he'd been-he'd been exposing Gon, all this time, all this time-all this time, because…

If he truly had wanted Gon entirely safe he should have…
And he felt dizzy at the realization...
Left him.

He tried to organize his thoughts. So he should have left him. If he truly- he should have- words got scrambled at the hitting like of the wall. The kitchens. He'd bumped with the door, the blackened doors of-

So he should leave the smaller one.

"Come on Killua!"

He somehow found himself sitting on a chair... staring... blankly... his open hands holding invisible weights. Shreds of past, disjointed, in front of his eyes and pointing at him, carrier of the guilt.

...

Inbox: one message received

Leorio, you up? I'm utterly bored...

Kurapica

I was asleep. You are the one responsible for that being in past tense.

I hate you

Leorio

want to change shifts? :)

Kurapica

Not even for money. You vowed to do it alone all night. Suck it

Leorio.

pd-the guys fine?

I can't hear much. But no one has left the door...

Kurapica
Killua stared at the crevices in the wooden table. A warm mug had just been put in between his hands. He was seated in one of the many abandoned tables of the cafeteria. It was sort of ghostly, that scenario.

"Gon" he looked up. The mug warming his hands.

"Taste it! It's my recipe. I found all what I needed in the kitchen" he pointed behind him grinning in mischief. Gon squirmed inside the profuse amount of blankets he'd brought. Killua also looked like a caterpillar for that matter anyway…

Killua shyly sipped his mug.
It tasted amazing. It definitely had honey. It also left a trace of probably who knows what mysterious thing behind. He noted how it warmed his chest down.

"This is awesome man" He whispered, sipping again as Gon's elastic smile widened.

Gon had made one for himself and now sipped. It'd been a long time since he'd done the recipe so he'd been slightly nervous. He looked at the albino's strands of hair, falling neatly over his forehead. The violet eyes looking at the table, their hue, like a night lilac petal under white washed moon.

"Ki-llu-aaaa" Gon called softly. Extending the vowels playfully.

"What"
"..."

Gon looked at him, his chin resting in his elbow

"….nuffin. Just like saying your name"

Killua sipped. A faint smile pressed against his mug. It was probably one of those brain wires Gon had loose.

"You can trust me" Out of the blue Gon spoke looking up.

Inward startling.
The albino closed his eyes catlike and sipped again. "I know"He stretched his own smile a little, to reassure his best friend.
He did not know. He knew he would never risk losing Gon.
"Killua"

"mmm"

"It'll make you feel better if you tell me"

The guy definitely knew how to make his guts freeze.

"Tell you what" he whispered lowly. They'd turned into heavy lead. An ill imagined certainty possessed him; he knew. If he wasn't a skilled poker face he would have gripped his seat tightly between his fists. He knew- he knew- he knew

"What was your nightmare." Gon explained easily. The metal lead liquefied into the usual plain cold. Relief. Gon did not know. Gon did not know.

Hah, just to tell a stupid nightmare. Sleep suddenly weighted his forehead towards the table. He'd had too much for this day. For this night. There his head rested. His voice now came out muffled. "Its bo-ring Gon…" he said weary.

"You want to sleep?"

Killua looked up. "Yeah… this stuff you gave me. Really strong dude. You should…" He let his cheek rest against the wooden surface "You should (yaaaawn) commercialize it…"

"You only think about money" Gon giggled with warmth.

"I'm still sort of Zoldick, what do you expect" He murmured smoothly as he looked up. "That and being sleepy is not a good combination it seems… who knows, maybe I will kill you in my sleep eh?" he laughed faintly pressing again his forehead to the wooden surface.

… He felt his hair being ruffled by his warm hands. He lied there. Unmoving. Wondering...

After somehow chatting on Nen and gambling (neh Killua, who would win, Zeno, or Hisoka? And Kaito or Wing san? And Biscuit or Gin? Yeah we don't know him but- but the way you imagine him, who would win?)- They'd made their own private sort of tent beneath one of the cafeteria tables.

They were shielded from the world by table cloths Gon found, and there, underneath and hidden, Gon had decided they would dwell for the night as if it wasn't crazy. The raven arranged their mugs to a corner. Killua just plopped the way cats do, dead weight to the floor. From all the places to sleep, the cafeteria uh? ... What could possibly go wrong, right guys? He yawned against the covers curling. He silently thanked Gon for the clairvoyance of the blankets and hated him for not letting them sleep somewhere more normal. And thanked that he was by his side…

He closed his eyes…

… And he couldn't sleep.

Even though he was in desperate need of doing so.

AAARGH. You know, Murphy laughing above. His mind wouldn't blur out of focus and silence into off mode, it was there, strenuously present. Babbling. Agh, he wanted almost achingly to sleep.

He stared at the wooden ceiling of a table above. It was nice for a change. Wood instead of white. It somehow made more sense to his sleepy brain. Being underneath the tablecloth, hidden of the world felt better.
Meanwhile Gon was cocooning himself in his own set of blankets, probably wondering about life.

"...Killuaaa" he whispered to his side.

"Mmm?"

There was a short silence.

"....Killuaaa"

"Just saying my name?" the albino murmured sleepily.

"Killua, tell me...something...anything..." Gon trailed idly. There was almost a hint of desperation, so subtle "you'll forget it by morning anyway..." he whispered the last.

"You're... not sleepy?" the albino's eyebrow rose.

Gon shook his head.

"...and... I can't sleep either" the pale boy complimented, closing his eyes tired. He took a hand to his face as he frowned.

"You still can't?" the raven wondered.

"Yeah...it sucks, doesn't it" It came out muffled. He turned to lie on his back weary.

"Keep drinking from your tea. Maybe I'll help" Gon was facing Killua.

"And... maybe...tell me..."

Killua exhaled "What again?"

"What was your nightmare about? Teeeell me. I'm bored"

He wasn't bored. He was scared. That's why he'd talked to Leorio...

"...I don't' remember Gon"

The raven rose his eyebrows "that's a lie"

Killua looked at his eyes directly; voice vexed "I do not remember"

"lie"

"I do not"

"lie!"

"agh I'm too tired, I won't put up with this. " Killua rolled his eyes annoyed, pushing himself further away.

"But you can't sleep"

"For the thousandth time, yes, I can't"

"why don't you tell me about your nightmares?"
"Because... I just- I - don't- remember that one"

"Ok , so will you tell me then what was the nightmare from the day before? or of Monday."

"well I don't remember any Gon" his voice strained. "how is this of importance again?"

Gon kept silent. His eyes flashed. "It is important that you are lying to me, and to my face"

Killua inhaled "I'm not" he whispered through clenched teeth. Gon stared.

"Bullshit" the raven whispered exasperated "I know when you lie Killua!"

"Then haven't you brilliantly thought maybe I don't want to tell you?" the silken voice sharp as a knife's edge. Gon looked at him.

Surprise.

Then hurt.

"...If so then you suck. You suck bad"

There was certain betrayal in his eyes that stung. Killua shook his head angry and snarled "Agh Gon! it's not! you know what? you like the who-gives-up-first and will toy with everyone that'll fall for it! Well get it. Today I won't play your stubborn games. Not this time ok?"

The honey eyes lit angered.

" That's unfair! I'm aware I'm stubborn but I'm not pulling you! I'm not the one whose ly-"

"Stop" He said icily

"...I won't! See?! You're hiding something from me" he snapped

" Gon!" he growled "I'm not. Now stop stepping on my toes" he let out briskly "last warning"

" I don't step on your toes, I just care Killua! I'm worried! I'm bored. Of it all. And you, you acting like this, distrustful, it's dull-

"... STOP BUGGING" he growled fiercely. Killua turned to face ahead. The blanket to his side was knotted tight in his fist.

"But-"

"...Back ...off" Gon met ice-cold eyes, the menacing stare. The raven did not even blink. The albino faced ahead again, his jaw clenched.

There was a stressful silence.

Gon glared.

The silence prolonged. And the raven's gaze hadn't wavered when he suddenly spoke lowly.

"... Two years ago I met you Killua. You want to argue the toss now? Fine...But you should know it's you the one who sometimes is stubborn to fault." the raven glared.

"Bye" Gon slumped and gave him his back.
Killua felt numb. He looked at Gon. This one stuffed himself further inside the blankets, giving him his back. Only his nape was visible. After some amount of fidgeting everything fell silent.

Dead silent.

He knew he'd been speaking the whole time over the surface. Insultingly so. Gon had been taking honestly. About… what he really felt went on… about…and he felt defensive. According to his parameters, nothing was going on. Nothing. If nothing was, so nothing should for Gon. He felt seasick. This wasn't real. A claw like knot clung to his throat

"…Gon?" He whispered.

It's dull- He'd said. He had been a boring friend. Ever since the incident, it was as if all all spun round that and…. now….Agh. He winced and closed his eyes- he felt the possessing fear Gon would give up on him. He would, his fear come true. Because… Stubborn he said. He felt driven to a wall since that day at the deck –a constant being on edge- continuously driven to a wall by everything, by everyone- his head pushed back to be suffocated- over and over against that wall in suspension, a repeated sequence of movements ingrained into his mind, into his windpipe and forehead.

That wasn't real. Real was him. That body. The one of the boy next to him. Breathing. His fist knotting the blanket. He opened his hand, the blanket slid of his palms. Real was that.

And real was that Gon had kept dead silent. And that minutes went by with him and his mind, him and his mind… him and-

"I'm sorry…" a whisper.

Killua turned his head at Gon's voice. The raven slowly turned. He was reading afraid the albino's eyes. "I'm sorry…" He shook his head and rested on his back, honeyed eyes on the wooden table of a ceiling they had.

No. He wasn't the one to apologize this time, and yet he was doing so. Killua closed his eyes.

Gon turned to face the albino again hesitating.

…He would sound crazy. But Killua would understand. When he started blabbering he was the only one that did. He looked up "I…feel left out…" Killua's gaze rose. Gon rushed "I won't ask questions you don't want to answer like about your wrist- or your nightly wanderings, or your stupid nightmares again….I was stupid to just…I'm sorry… Just…just don't shut me out… You're, you're shutting me out…" he murmured."You are…shutting me …out" … you are…

Killua had been numb. But his words- he felt simultaneously a void in the cavity of his chest...and a warmth like a lit match. The known desperate tuck to ask for help…v/s reality. The need to unburden his shoulders, his tongue, his eyes… v/s the crude truths he would not even face…

…and loosing… something that was too precious… I can risk all but you. His eyes looked into the caramel ones… void and warmth.

Loosing himself in that gaze and Killua could imagine telling him, just because- like when you imagine impossible stuff just because- just because-just because. Could he? No, he could never know his reaction, how the hell was he supposed to know how would Gon, how to even imagine hah- he-

You disgust me

Dark orbs pierced his mind. A gun to his throat.
Gon called him softly.

... Up to now his answer had been that absent silence.

"I'm sorry" Killua whispered barely. He imagined the metal cold barrel almost visible against his windpipe, charring his chords.

The honeyed eyes reflected the dim light as Gon crawled nearer. That definitely proved he was inch by inch loosing it and he shut tight his eyes again-

His hand.

Suddenly Gon's palm had slid against the hollow of his hand. His open fingers knotted to his own to Killua's startling. Gon rested so near, looking with fathomless eyes at their hands now intertwined...He observed dazzled. The meaning escaped him as if he was asperger or something. Only left was the being stunned and the warmth in their knotted hands.

As seconds dilated, his mind just wondered idly in the maybe...maybe... Probably it was his eyes looking at their hands... That fathomless gaze...they could explain how somehow he felt more inclined to hope. He found himself crossing the thought; maybe he could tell him what his nightmares were about. The nightmares that did not involve it-he meant him- he shut his eyes- not all of it, hell no. But- but part of it, maybe he would understand and maybe it would help make him act less strange- maybe he could talk-maybe he would talk …

"You're right..." he whispered. He realized he felt faint.

...Caramel eyes looked his way. "You're-you're right Gon" he stuttered. "...you always are..." he trailed. He laughed weakly...

Gon's eyes held him.

He opened his mouth.

...

There... that's all he could manage

Silence.

No.

He breathed again.

"...I'll tell you. About the nightmares" He turned his head to face the smaller one, tilted head.

"It'll make you feel better right?" the albino genuinely asked "and maybe... I'll help...me" he murmured. Gon sought his eyes. Killua sighed "I've been acting all weird neh?" it was barely a thread of a voice that reached the raven in the dark. Killua's eyes closed "sometimes I think I'm going crazy even..." He whispered. "So it'll probably help..."

And the albino gave him that faint tilted grin Gon knew by heart.

The raven could not hide the surprise that crept his features. He assented slowly. Not letting go. Somehow this was the Killua he knew better. He hadn't flinched about their hands, none of them had...

There was a wide gap of silence in which Killua was possessed by incredulity of his own talking
capacities. He could not say everything, so he was looking for the safe summary. He inhaled air... "Ok. My nightmares. The ones that bother you that much" he murmured playfully. But his voice lowered "Let me see... I dream about... stuff that used to happen at my house... you know... stuff they did to me" he shrugged.

Gon kept silent. The raven had expected an explanation of the sort, but it was different to hear it. It was a bit gut-wrenching to hear... Both were acting oblivious to their knotted hands... he was about to open his mouth when Killua cut in a somewhat hushed tone.

"It wasn't nearly all that bad, not at all, there were really good stuff..." he explained... "There were lots of cool things. Like being able to eat whatever you wanted- and knowing lots of awesome places thanks to work... Dad was tough but he was always cool- and so was bothering that fat otaku of Milluki" his expression had softened with a distant smile of a memory. "It was cool having zillions to spend on toys and games. It was cool to imagine I was a ninja when on a mission... I remember telling other online gamers that I was a killer, and it was like super funny..."

Gon was grinning. Fascination, he felt it sparking in his chest. He tried to cover endearment near his heart at each image lit. But he had to get focused.

"You dream with that stuff too?"

Killua thought. "No... not at all... It was so long ago... as if it was another life" he mumbled. Blankly staring the ceiling.

"...You dream about the awful stuff"

In that lost stare Killua assented slowly. "...Nightmare's pick uh?"

"...what... stuff did they do to you?" Gon murmured, his eyes locked into his figure

"I have told you guys in other situations..." Killua spoke nonchalant as he passed a hand through his white strands.

"Yes. Very briefly. I want to hear again... I want to know... what it was like to be you back then..." Gon murmured. Searching eyes.

Killua exhaled. He would give Gon what he needed. It's just... that small white-haired boy, hanging from some abandoned ceiling in his mind, it'd been other him. As if he had been left behind. "Ok". Shrugging inside, he decided to just tell whatever came to his mind in remembrance.

"Lemme see... they would... give me poison to train me. They would... hang me from the ceiling for hours... They would chain me, and whip me..." He spoke removed, " or burn me... They taught me how to handle all these." he paused "and they were good teachers... but sometimes it would happen I just couldn't... the electric shocks, I couldn't..." he smiled faintly "well what else? They starved me, or left me locked in a room for weeks. and then they would... Take me to..." Killua paused "to practice on field my profession and stuff..."

Gon's gaze was intense... he looked at him directly to his eyes. Killua somehow mistook it and reformulated "oh yeah, ex-profession" but Gon whispered faintly

"There... who did you fear the most?"

Killua wondered about the word choice. Who did you fear, and not what did you fear. The way he told the story had made it all sound impersonal. He could have been asked what he feared and he could have said, poison, or electricity, or chains, what the hell. But who, he'd been asked who.
"Well...in all those stuff... they'd mostly leave me to Illumi's care..." He leveled his voice "he trained me..."

Gon's eyes were expectant "He did."

Killua felt silent. He felt removed from his words. And yet dangling too near the edge...

"He..." Killua fixed his eyes to the wooden ceiling as he spoke. "Illumi was cruel. He could do whatever he wanted with me" he whispered smoothly "$\ldots$Jump in one leg. I would. Do not eat. I would... Kill... I would. At the moment... it felt like I was..." he trailed and breathed "$\ldots$no, it was true. At the moment I was... his property... He would say his doll" he whispered detachedly. He smiled bitterly to the ceiling. "How sick is that...

The albino noted how he felt Gon hold tight on his own. His eyes... there was anger there.

"What things did he do to you?" Gon stared directly at Killua's eyes.

"He made me kill"

There was a deadly silence.

The room was too dark, and so was their tent, it was easy to paint the crevices of the hanging cloths with different meanings...

"Killua..." his voice was low. Was it anger? Suddenly afraid of what he was going to say Killua cut Gon's speech.

"Yes I know. I'm also glad it's all over, and that now I'm living the life" He shook his head.

"Then why was he here?"

Silence... and Killua sighed feeling...frail.... "I-- I really don't know why he came back" his shoulders slumped depressed. Who knows why his brother had returned to torture him... The only explanation was self pleasure which was sick. For some time he'd actually thought he'd outgrown his tastes...His jaw clenched. He suddenly had felt the bitter side of him arising in sick ropes, lashing. Inadvertently hating the flash of his own frailty, suddenly defensive- loathing – wanting to be alone – loathing everything and everyone truly -as if he'd just drank gasoline- he closed his eyes

"Hey. Thank you"

The words delayed their entrance to his mind. He... found himself seeking and finding Gon's humble expression in the dark.

"Uh"

"Thank you. For telling me." He stared again at Killua

He clung to those words. His eyes... intensely -lovingly, the beautiful honey colour piercing his chest, and still somewhat melted into tenderness. He became aware again of their knotted hands...

His warmth...His void...

He ...he seemed to know how much effort it'd meant. He seemed to know about the unverbalized... all.... Killua hadn't noticed at first but Gon was radiating anger...

The albino softly almost imperceptibly leaned towards the tanned boy, and Gon felt it.

...
"Killua..." the raven whispered. Leaning closer too...closing his eyes... he could breathe his scent...

"Let's leave." A soft silence "Let's go to Whale Island"

Killua opened his eyes... "But..."

"Kurapica? I know... but... it doesn't matter... Let's leave" Gon whispered. Leaning closer... his warmth...

"Are you sure"

"yes" Certain resolution was bound like a promise to his gaze. Killua shut tight his eyes. Unprepared for the overwhelming feeling. They would leave... They would leave...

Nightmare... nightmare in the dark... with your fearful symmetry... are you over?

The raven held himself so close...

"... Killu"

"Mmm"

"....Can you sleep now" Gon whispered to the dark.

Killua had closed his eyes catlike "I think so..." he hummed... This time he wasn't lying...

...

Gon leaned closer. There was a long silence, where they just felt the warmth of each other's breathing. The raven bit his lip... He could try or he could not, he thought to himself. He decided he would.

He took Killua's shoulder to lean a bit closer -

Whoa-At the touch he'd cringed away, his eyes widened in terror for half a second-fuck. Gon took away his hand immediately as if burnt.

"No! I mean no!, uh-" and Killua now wide awake quickly placed Gon's hand on his shoulder again as if to mend the action before- it all had been so perfect just a moment ago, geez!

"I mean, not if you don't want to touch me," he added quickly and dropped Gon's hand "but I, I don't bother if you-I-I-m so-sorry, I" Killua stuttered petrified, suddenly two meters away, the connection to their hands broken.

Laughter like chimes- And his dread was frozen.

Gon looked at him giggling. With... fondness?... and suddenly the raven fell on him, half pushing-half embracing him-one swift motion laughing

"Sometimes you're such an idiot"

Killua was paralysed on his back.

He'd stopped breathing. Against his chest his heart was hammering wildly. He was dirty. He was.

Real dirty not imaginary, his hair, his skin ugh dirty-dirty-one shower wouldn't do-would never- and electrified by an image... no, too many images, he tried to break from skin contact- as for a second he forgot the one hugging him was Gon, just feeling the weight over his chest again too soon,
remembering, remembering, alarm bells ringing on his head, skin to skin memories, laying on his back— but he was paralysed Helplessly paralysed against the floor. He shut tight his eyes.

But then he felt Gon's scent.
His scent.

He breathed in, as slowly as he could with his heart hammering like that.
Something soothed inside him. Those taunting feelings... he could feel them toning down. They were still there like needles, but on the background... allowing other that was slowly growing inside of him to take place. This was Gon. The tanned boy was clasped to Killua as if holding for dear life...

... Some dark intuition of what actually was happening made him feel Killua was slipping of his hands slowly... if he knew....He did not care... whatever he had to hide... he just...if Killua knew...

Killua felt something that was alien to him, comfort? A nervous laughter- he'd been way too hugged these times, first Leorio, then Gon, twice... and now Gon hugged him even tighter if possible. Killua felt Gon's skin so softly against his own...different to other skins...his warmth instead of those cold hands.... Yes it was a different skin, a different scent- He breathed in deeply all that Gon meant.
Yes... all that he was, as he held on to his scent and skin as if for survival, without risking to let go. He closed his eyes. It did... feel good... just to have him near....

But he wasn't .... Ready to tell that...

He wouldn't be in a long time. Maybe he could if he worked on the idea—he cheered himself up—maybe... some day...
"Gon..."
It was almost inaudible.

He'd taken his time... But he'd ended up softly embracing him back.

"We'll leave tomorrow" Gon murmured. Killua nodded in his neck....

They kept in silence, like that, just drowned in the warmth of the proximity of their bodies...covered by the blankets... None of them had even crossed the thought of giving meaning to their hold...as if it wasn't something new... as if it'd always been this way.

Minutes, or hours... time went by before a drowsy Gon motioned him to separate. As they did, Gon laid on his side facing him, with one arm resting on Killua's arm and his face again, so near his neck he could feel him breathing, his eyes closed....

Killua soon felt Gon breathing evenly by his side, and soon he let all slip.... to finally sleep...
And every time he woke up with a start, Gon's arm would tighten around his.

Guys...
All was clad in black and soft. Not just yet, five minutes more Nanny...

Guys- wake up

Nanny? Who was nanny? It should have been mom. Such a horrible mother he had anyways. He opened his eyes feeling his lids comfortably heavy. Leorio focused into his sight and he had a proustian moment of relocating his body to the present. Gon still snored at his side. Both had totally
forgotten Biscuit's training no? About being always vigilant and purple whatevers.

"Guys" Leorio murmured gently now looking at the unresponding Gon. The doctor was knelt under the table, his long extremities bent with difficulty into the invented tent.

"Leorio" Killua raised his head sleepy.

"Uh... just so you know guys... I think you are in big trouble" He said amused.

"No, you see, there's no such problem" Kurapica began once again, standing up politely from his chair. Leorio, at his side, sighed; this was no good.

The doctor noted how Gon fidgeted nervously looking to the floor like a wet dog.

Killua meanwhile listened all, quite bored to death. Leorio observed that at certain remarks, he bore a mild expression of amusement. The tall doctor, seated uncomfortably in those small wooden chairs, tuned into the conversation again, only to notice Kurapica had again been interrupted by the very incensed captain.

They'd been summoned not one hour after the cafeteria incident... He heard scrambled words on the whole ordeal- how you can't imagine the cook's dismay when he found the lock forced and the scandal when the waitresses arrived to find the quaint tent in the middle of the cafeteria- which, by the way, had to be functional in no less than ten minutes for no less than five hundred passengers.

In regards to the sleeping scouts -which have no legal guardianship whatsoever nor blood relationship to you as I have been informed- and so I might as well call authorities to take legal actions - well, as to them, they'd been thrown out of the place immediately, and then been dully interrogated all morning in regards to the method used in the nightly break in. They all had difficulties grasping the fact that being a hunter was more than ninja movements and the license.

The problem was that this was not their first one.

"This is a five-star cruise! You were only allowed because of that nut case in power at the hunter committee! But you haven't even paid for the services, you are being allowed here. I will inform this to Netero!" The enraged captain raised his voice, his nose and ears turning slightly red with each huff.

"It won't be necessary" Kurapica tried again softly but was interrupted.

"it is!" At his side, Gon's cloud of gloom seemed to flood him. "Maybe you do not understand the severity of all the deeds, let alone the material damages and money but then, how old are you sir, by the way?"

Kurapica sighed, slightly vexed because he considered himself no child. He opened his mouth in polite protest but the captain cut in, picking a paper from his desk.

"Ah ah ah" he stopped the blond warningly, and began to read

"Over the last few weeks damages have been committed that endanger the proper order and welfare of the ship and its passengers, by your group. Now, as I said earlier, I've expected all these days an explanation, but I have not received one yet! Where do I begin? With the most expensive damage to the cruise? the closure of the entire gymnasium area, where All the mirror walls were destructed without possible repair" he huffed "that is, shattered to slush ?!" He paced
"The replacement will only be possible when we arrive to a metropolis, which is almost three weeks away from now! I guess you have written the explanation I shall give as an answer to all the passengers who paid for a service that they aren't receiving, am I right? Then there's the- and I will use these words sir- the pool prank from last Tuesday by that boy who, I must say, has been the one causing most trouble"-

A quick glare was directed to Killua. The albino stared at the captain's eyes with a dark empty eyes. Everyone noticed how it froze the captain for a second. A slight shiver shook him before he proceeded

"Well, both, particularly him, have no respect or conscience of the schedule and restrictions of areas. The use of showers outside schedule or the use of a public space for private reasons is inexcusable- by the way, you left the water heater on the other night. *And* for your knowledge, you have a shower in your own room" he directed his eyes to Killua and without breathing turned to Leorio

"Then we have you, sir" he pointed "intimidating the nurses and renting an infirmary room of your own. Maybe you were not explained the protocol but that is *not* a service available for passengers at all! Not even with your almighty hunter license. They claimed you were rather desperate to have the infirmary room for your own use, but whatever situation given, if of urgency, should be contacted to *me*." He pointed to his chest.

"Because sincerely, even though in my place, I've been obliged to watch security cameras to present a case, since none of you have ever presented *reasons* for your actions or came forward after the deeds!" He rose his hand to the air "This is the problem of hunters, you believe you own everything and do not possess an ounce of respect!"

He lifted the paper

"Here! Look here!" he read speedily "there's again the too frequent use of prohibited and dangerous spaces like the roof, the boilers and control cabin for the futile purpose of recreation! I mean, *seagulls*. So *do* understand- yesterday was only the last straw! I stress out this is not an isolated incident"

Leorio tried a word but was cut.

" Excuse me sir but items were taken of the kitchen, items that are of the ship's property! Not being enough, we had to dismount your tent-like lodgings, which delayed the entire breakfast schedule. We are speaking of hundreds of complaints on the delay that I as a captain have to answer and take responsibility for. Not to mention the break in of the cafeteria in the night and the deliberate use of force to dismount the lock! This is inadmissible"

Gon, though tearless, seemed about to cry.

Kurapica tried again to speak but was interrupted "No sir, I'm sorry. Whatever you say now, it is too late for consideration...Basic requirements were not followed and behaviour is far beyond the admissible of a passenger." The captain inhaled deeply "I showed you my trust that day we shared the rum. But it has not been returned. I must somberly inform you that you are expelled of this ship. "

"What?"

"Well, as you heard sir! Expelled!"

There was a brief silence.

And Killua burst in laughter.
Leorio and Kurapica snapped their heads to give him a stern look. Kurapica raised his hands and finally spoke

"As I was saying, sir, I am very sorry for all the inconveniences we have caused you. I take full responsibility for the two youngsters here which have caused the most trouble."

"I as well" Leorio added.

"Whatever measures you say, we will abide. I agree in everything you have expressed, and I'm truly sorry, our behaviour has been inexcusable…" Kurapica nodded slowly with apologetic eyes and precise words

"However I was just trying to inform you it won't be necessary to expel us from the ship. This morning, without connection to the events happening at the cafeteria I was going to approach you in regards of our departure. The truth is we have to leave in quite a hurry. Therefore you do not need to spend on a boat or transport measures or take unnecessary inconveniences to get rid of us. You can leave us in the next inhabited island. The hunter committee will send a jet"

As Kurapica informed him, the captain's face somewhat subtly morphed. First he seemed confused, but as he understood he began nodding earnestly. "So you are leaving. The four of you, do I understand correctly?"

"Yes sir. It is the least we can do after all the trouble we have caused you"

"Exactly. I cannot stress this more. Then we have an agreement."

"Yes"

The captain breathed slowly as if trying to calm himself. He looked up wary "and in regards of the material damage?"

"We take full responsibility. Us and the hunter committee, as to how much you decide to charge to compensate for the damages" Kurapica replied.

The captain nodded. "Very well, very well. This is the response I was expecting all along"

Gon suddenly spoke. His voice almost non-existent, looking to the ground

"Captain…I'm extremely sorry… I really am, for all. We did not think-"

"It's quite clear you did not think" the captain interrupted the conflicted boy severely. He settled the paper on the desk as if to settle the matter, and have the four of them out as soon as possible. But Leorio stood.

"Sir I just want to intercede for the smaller ones" Leorio looked up "Formally, being expelled of the ship will be written in their hunter record, you might be informed. I wanted just to point out…They are kids…" his voice softened as he proceeded.

"They're extraordinary kids who got to be hunters too soon. They are kind-hearted. They are restless and mischievous and probably have ADHD... they have misused what was given to them." he looked at the younger ones "You are in all your right to inform of their inexcusable behaviour to the hunter committee director. But do no expel them formally. This may be inked permanently in their hunter career and future name. It's sad to blemish their registry being them so young…"

The captain hesitated. He stumbled into the raven's shamed look. He had a beautiful honey eye color.
They were cast down as if truly humiliated. The other one seemed apathetic, but this one seemed a
nice kid. The captain exhaled.

"Very well. I won't expel him. I mean them. Of course I expect repayment for all the material
damage as soon as possible"

"Yes, we will sir"

Gon immediately raised his head. Conflict and determination sizzling his eyes.

"No sir I refuse"

There was a silence where even Killua turned his head worried

"What?" The captain's eyes bulged misreading Gon.

"We have to take the brunt of our actions. It is our responsibility. Please do expel us formally" Gin's
son said with determination over the hurt. The captain observed him.

"And you think I care about your opinion? Because as matters are, you didn't worry about mine, eh
kid?"

Gon nodded emphatically "It is true, and for that we are in your debt. Please do not spare us for we
do not deserve it" he said keeping his voice steel steady.

"I will choose what will be done" the captain said gravely "and it will be in benefit of the ship and
my welfare and not your honour" he said sternly, even though he already felt certain fondness for the
kid. Gon looked down.

The captain wrapped his hands together "all my polite regards but we'll be expecting your leave as
soon as possible. I hope it doesn't sound as hypocrite to say, it was nice meeting you. Farewell. "

Kurapica nodded

Thank you very much"

They were outside in silence.

Killua smirked "ADHD eh?" He nudged Leorio.

"I've never been more sincere"

Gon was unnaturally silent. And gloomy. Kurapica sighed heavily. As if gathering patience in a
single inhalation. But his and Leorio's benevolent smiles- not even one look of disappointment just
contributed to increase the raven's guilt. They'd done it this time. It was beyond sympathetic denial.
They'd done it.

Killua nudged him. Gon looked up.

"Hey... it's all over man" he smiled gently. "It's not that bad, it's funny"

But the raven kid raised his head "I'm... I'm sorry guys" he looked at the doctor and the kuruta who
had taken the brunt for them.

"We were leaving anyways" Kurapica spoke wearily but matter-of- fact.
Gon eyebrows tilted as he looked down. He'd disappointed the friends that trusted him, hadn't he… "I really am sorry… "

"We know" Kurapica curved the corner of his mouth. Gon raised his head timidly and looked at the elder blond. Leorio frowned weary, adjusting his glasses

"We're not going to lecture you so cast away those wet puppy eyes"

Killua snickered "you heard the old guys? Gon, take it! It's a one in a lifetime opportunity! They aren't- going- to -lecture- us! I mean, us"

Gon lifted a faint smile. He caught himself thinking on his snigger, the violet eyes, the certainty he would always be mischievous and daring. He grinned. But he had to turn to matters.

"Kurapica… why are we in a hurry?"

A gentle breeze blew rustling their clothes.

It'd been hanging in the air, the question, for some time now since the explanation. Leorio and Kurapica had spoken this and prepared their departure story in advance, but still there was this hesitance that made Gon frown "because you weren't lying in there with the captain, were you?"

"No…I wasn't" The blond nodded slowly.

"…not interested, so I'm going to pack" Killua murmured and turned on his heels. As if a survival instinct had triggered in.

"Wait" Leorio kept him in place taking a hand to grasp his collar-bone from behind. He felt his tensing shoulders blades as he was stopped but Leorio directed his attention to the blond.

"I wasn't lying…" Kurapica sighed. "I think the Phantom Brigade is chasing us. Or rather…me… well, I do not need to involve you guys in a fight…but..."And Leorio noticed how the kuruta's analytical nature gave way to his sincere words in the hesitation"But… I said I would stay with my friends for some time and a promise is a promise, right Gon?"

He exhaled "I do not want to endanger you, so I'll leave again soon… but not yet…Let's…be sometime together. I owe it to you. But until then, I'll guess I'll just have to ask you to be on the run with me."

Gon appreciated the honesty. The first for quite some time around the place it seemed. He smiled eagerly.

"We can go to Whale Island, at least for a week"

"Actually we can. It's such a faraway island that with the hunter committee's help I don't think they'll be able to follow" Kurapica nodded.

There was a thick silence. Killua felt aware of every finger gently pressing his collarbone. He wasn't facing them. He wanted to run but the reason was irrational. Or maybe it wasn't. He tried to put thoughts into place, instead of the empty feeling of the hand to his shoulder. Kurapica wasn't confronting the Spiders. That nagged him. As much as how he'd been kept in place. It was as if they'd just told them the world was upside down. Comradeship? Kurapica would never avoid fighting the Spiders –unless he was trying to protect them? Or unless he was staying for a reason- He gave a hesitant step but Leorio held him firm, though his eyes were on the conversation.

"I…sort of knew" Gon looked down, breaking his stare from Kurapica's eyes
A blond eyebrow raised and Leorio knew they'd used the Phantom Brigade as an excuse – it'd been time bought to figure out who had been following them because it wasn't the Spiders. He actually hadn't been speaking the truth. Even though he suspected they were near…but still, this was new-

"What do you know Gon?"

"Again why do I have to stay? I'm tired" Killua's voice was low. He gave a step forward but Leorio held him. "Wait Killua" He wanted to ask him something-but Gon replied

"Well... what I know for sure is that someone's been following us." He shrugged easily

At this Kurapica's eyes darkened…

Leorio's expression sombered as well…

But then the doctor suddenly became aware of the still figure he held. Killua had frozen on place under his grasp. His eyes…

"And the most obvious answer is that it's the Phantom Brigade." Gon shrugged. "You felt their presence too… Also Hisoka was near. Besides, I recognized their Nen in the last few islands"

It wasn't to be expected. But Kurapica's eyes flashed. It was a dangerous glint, for just a second; but Gon recognized the change of thought.

The change of volition.

That piece of information. Gon observed Kurapica so you won't be staying with us then? You're just trying to get us away from the Spiders, so you can fight them alone, no? It was just words to get them off this ship and away. Gon sighed a little vexed. He'd had to ask Killua what he thought about the entire deal. He turned to exchange a compliance glance with his best friend.

He found the violet eyes…void.

Suddenly he noticed Killua's entire cast down frame, his frozen stare, and the tense shoulders under the doctor's grasp. The void eyes. A chill ran down his spine.

"Let him go, Leorio" he spoke lowly. And he was surprised to notice his voice had almost a feral touch.

Kurapica turned his head surprised. The moment he said it, Gon almost regretted it confused- the raven immediately realized he did not understand the tone his voice had just adopted… he only identified the surge of protection that had suddenly overcome him at the image.

Leorio loosened his grasp immediately, startled as well. Killua shook his head. He turned stunned… to find the honey eyes.

"...I'm leaving to pack" the albino said absently. "Bye guys..." he trailed as his feet carried him forward.

The three of them looked at the albino leaving.

"Then why I hear there was quite some material damage? Are you sure you did not leave the ship on the captain's command?" The knowing old eyes narrowed "I do know, by experience, that those two can be trouble eh?" Netero laughed.
"It's all taken care of, President. You do not need to worry about anything. Thanks again for sending the jet" Kurapica replied curtly.

The old man in the screen of his computer raised an eyebrow

"So I do not need to take care of anything, is it?" he paused "or you do not wish for me to find out about their atrocities?" he chuckled and crossed his hands in his lap

"No-I-"

"But…are you sure, Kurapica, that you should be the one taking responsibility? It is them that did the wreckage. You were just invited to the cruise. It's even curious" he said connivingly "I do believe other affairs in your agenda are far more urgent than a trip to whale island"

"I-"

"and they're hunters. They can take care by themselves. They should demonstrate they deserve their license" and old voice of power raised to step. "If they can handle it or not, why would you be interested" his eyes gleamed and his voice lowered"because…I believed there are far more important promises that bind you, are there not?"

Kurapica paled and opened his mouth but Leorio suddenly turned the computer to his direction "I disagree!"

"Oh, hi Leorio. So there you were. Still in the suit eh?" he reckoned the tall guy with mirth.

"Honourable President I'm sorry to interrupt but I believe you should raise the minimum age to classify as a hunter. Kids should not be allowed the kind of responsibility that the license imposes" he said valiantly.

Netero burst in laughter.

"So THAT much trouble they have become for you two? Ha ha ha!" He laughed heartily, small droplets gathered at the corners of his eyes "If so, you should leave the two alone and unburden yourselves….eh?"

"No! -I meant-" the tall man shifted flustered

"Leorio" the elder cut him with benevolence "numerous young hunters have made huge contributions to the welfare of this world. Gin being one himself! And he began at twelve... We would be taking their legal right to help and contribute with their natural talent if we were picky."

"-but what about their right to safety and integrity and what if dysfunctional famil- hey! "

The computer was taken from his hands by a displeased Kurapica. He cleared his mouth, orderly setting the machine in place "I'm quite sorry for the disruption to our conference Mr. President" he replied coldly. "We are missing the point to our conversation"

"Kurapica" Netero paused "do tell this old man….do you have feelings akin to those of your friend?"

Kurapica's nose slightly wrinkled... The old man surely wanted to fool with them as to the double layer of evil meaning that last sentence allowed.

It would have passed unnoticed if it weren't for the little gleaming eyes.
The blond remained serious as he stated objectively "You have asked so I will reply with honesty about the subject" He stated to the screen. His frown creased "I do believe the selection to be a hunter should be more rigorous. I do not make reference to the *flamboyant* show of abilities... as to the fact it should really take into consideration the psychological qualities necessary to exercise the hunter profession with much more criteria" he let out coldly.

All instantly knew he spoke strictly in regards to his own promotion: Hisoka and Illumi. Kurapica proceeded unperturbed

"If I'm not mistaken, the heart of being a hunter requires a will to help the social and natural world. However, many candidates along the years have shown dubious intentions, and yet have the power the license gave them to concrete transgressions, traffic and deviltry."

In their communication space floated the semantic knowledge that last time Kurapica had spoken to Netero directly it been amidst a quite heated argument… about the validity of the last match a friend of theirs had been subject to…and his disqualification.

Netero, quite serious, held Kurapica's stare somberly as the blond spoke the last. He remained in silence yet unwavering, moments after. Kurapica paled but held his gaze as well.

Until the old man's dry lip curved upward. He lifted a finger and pointed them.

"Hah!"

Leorio and Kurapica both were startled as Netero chuckled "ha-ha-ha!" The old man rose his eyebrows "Well you are quite right, Kurapica! As brilliant as always! Thus I inform you that the same issue is currently being discussed in the hunter committee. Psychological criterion are being taken into consideration right now for next year's applicants" He chuckled.

Then he raised his voice to an imaginary speaker out there. "Leorio if you are still somewhere, *do* know I will pose your concern in regard of the ages! Ha ha ha, funny guys…"

Leorio bent to Kurapica's shoulder to nod at the screen solemnly.

"All is settled little guys. In three days a jet will arrive to the seventh island of the sword, -that is the one where the ship is currently leaving you, right?" They both nodded "If there's a delay of more than five hours, please do tell me through this media"

They nodded.

He raised an open palm

"Fare well this night" He spoke slowly and gravely. Almost yoda-like.

"Good by President Netero..."

On the screen, the president turned to leave when he paused his movements. He directed his eyes to the pair again.

"Kurapica, one last thing. The financial problems in regards to your children's wreckage…They've been already taken care of" he nodded tilting his head "along with quite a compensation to the captain. He shouldn't be bothering you any further. I hope you have a nice voyage" he winked. Kurapica was about to protest when Netero interrupted him "if you need an explanation, just understand I consider myself as the personal sponsor of those children's deeds" he said with elder fondness.
"Mr. Netero-
"Byeee!"

The connection had been cut.

Kurapica stared at the black screen. "….that old man" he murmured under his breath. "Slick as a..."

"Snot! I know! "Leorio echoed "your children? And how did he say it- Oh, right, little guys! Little guys-I mean, what is he thinking- I'm anything but little!"

Gon and Killua were facing each other. On their tummies. Head resting on hands. Inside the ventilator system. 

Above Leorio and Kurapica's heads. 

Gon was particularly staring through the grille at the doctor scalp, while he was barking some profanities. The raven bit his lip. 

"Three days" he whispered. "That's so long. And they are near"

"Spiders? We don't know that for sure" Killua cleaned the dust on his elbows. He looked up

"... you're… troubled" the albino stated.

"Yeah…"

Gon looked down again, trying to eavesdrop something.

Kurapica seemed to have entered the bathroom and was splashing water to his face. The faucet on and he could only hear dory speaking whale sort of sounds from below.

He looked up to meet the albino's sly expression. 

"Spill the beans"

Gon exhaled and bit his lip again "I think that Kurapica will fight them. Even Netero said he should" he whispered.

"I don't think Netero ever spoke on a literal level in the entire conversation…but he does sponsor us. Well, you… everybody keeps getting fond of you Gon” he rolled his eyes.

There was a small silence filled in by the tap water sounding in the background.

"Would you follow me to the craziest?" Gon whispered out of the blue.

Killua stared. He lowered his lashes, a hand to his chin. And he looked up again, a faint smile etched to his lips.

"...Haven't I already, Gon?" he tilted his head "I mean…Greed Island- a game where no one has come out alive, mmm, seems legit."

Gon's smile had widened, and he'd opened his mouth to say something stupid and sweet- Killua second guessed. But as the raven's mouth opened wide he inhaled enthusiastically tons of dust, which went indiscriminately inside his air ducts.
"aaa—ghsh"

He stifled a sneeze choking. And held his breath.

"No no no no, don't-" Killua's eyes widened.

Gon gaped shaking his head from side to side "ah-

"Hold it, hold it!"

Gon's eyes were shut, tiny tears at the corners "ah-ah-ah-

Killua's hands flew to his mouth to cover him as Gon quaked

"Ah-CHOO!" he sneezed with violence against Killua's hand quite loudly.

They both froze.

Below, the doctor, who had been pacing, froze as well.

He looked from side to side in their tiny room.

"Hey Kurapica, did you hear that?"

From the bathroom the blond turned off the faucet "you asked me something Leorio?"

The doctor looked suspiciously to every corner of the room.

"Leorio, after this we are asking him. Right away. When we arrive to the island... "

"Mm"

"Where are the guys by the way?" Kurapica was fetching a towel in the bathroom cabinets.

The friends were frozen on their navels, completely holding their breath. Not even looking through the grille. Killua's hand on Gon's.... gooey mouth.

Killua hadn't heard wrong.

"Mmm…” the doctor examined the windows. Certain suspicion lingering to the hand posed on his chin. "I could swear I heard Gon sneezing…” he mumbled in thought.

"Kurapica" he called "I'll go check on the guys okay?" he voiced out "Anyways we have to get ready to leave like now. We are almost at the island, no?"

"O-key. Go fetch them, I'll stay here. I'm just so…sleepy. Ages I had guarded night watch on someone. I've been up for like 48 hours…weren't we supposed to be on vacation?"

Gon finally moved to cover his own mouth slowly. Still a bit terrorized at the prospect of almost being found. Killua shook his thoughts away as he stared at his hand with visible disgust. And looked at the raven accusingly.

"...I mean Eww. I'm covered in your snot Gon" he snapped, extending the hand for Gon to see. He looked again at his palm with vexation "Just-Eeww"

"so-sorry -sorry-so-o-oo-ry-y!" Gon tried to stifle his giggles. Killua exhaled, clearing his hand on his own shirt. He'd get revenge on Gon for this.
"Killua… what the guys said… who do you think they will speak with?"

The albino met Gon's eyes with zealous decision. His low voice smooth to his handsome features in the dim light.

"Gon, whatever they meant I calculate we have some five minutes to return"

Then, a devious glint gloved his voice "Do you feel like racing whale-kid? Cause I'm leaving, like… now"

"bu-"

Oh but he'd disappeared. Down the now open grille, to skirt across the room's window and out without even the slightest stir of a sound. Kurapica wasn't even given the chance to notice the blur, still in the bathroom

"What a cheater!" Gon bit his lip to hide the frustration as he jumped as well and raced.

When Leorio arrived to their room, Gon was zipping his luggage with brutal efforts for closure. Killua had his own baggage to his side, as he laid over his bed, arms behind his head, looking up smug.

"…you were here the entire time?"

Gon looked up confused.

"Oh, hi Leorio! Uuuuuuughh—stupid BAG!"

"Let me help. We have to be ready soon…"

The sun set as they were driven away on a small boat to the island.

Kurapica sat facing at the giant piece of land, a monstrous set of greenery… Leorio stared at Kurapica, because his hair kindled strands of gold to the evening light. Gon's skin had a glow of his own, along with his eyes, as he filled and emptied a bucket with water, perched to one side, in a way Mito would have probably thought dangerous.

He sat in the further edge hugging his knees. His hands were hidden in the oversized pullover. He stared at the setting sun…

…He hadn't felt hiTs presence that day...

The ship stood ominous yet further and further… In his belly were held different of his nightmare scenarios, the deck, the stairs, the halls, the bedrooms, his steps, oh weren't they still firmly detained in another looped timeline...

…But it'd been where they'd made their tent… it'd been where they held hands.

All was left behind.

That ship had housed them for those weeks. Before it'd been Kaito, before it'd been Yorkshin, somewhere between the dry plateaus of Greed Island… They were nomads… they were homeless…

But now they would get back to Whale Island… their safe harbour…

The boat skimmed the darkening seas, waves lapping against wood, inked in the golden colors. They
seem to chant...

Away

Away

Away…

Chapter End Notes

A/N:

My cat died. She was run over by a car... just this week...
It may sound stupid for some, but she was my true companion. I miss her so so so so much- I remember having pets when little.. but never had it hurt so much as it did now. She would sleep with me, and lunch with me, and whenever I took her in my arms to shoot the world she would lick my nose. Her name was Marceline (after Adventure Time)... she was all white and had blue eyes...she was purrfect... I actually used to sing to her as i held her in my arms (8) Oh marceline, it's just you and me in the wreckage of the world (8) that must be so confusing for a little caaat (8)

Gone. That fast. She was full of life. It was only a hit to her head but it killed her.

I found her in the middle of my street, lifeless. She could have been sleeping. But her heart wasn't beating. It's strange, what death does to a warm body... her eyes went grey, her tongue was rigid, her sphincters collapsed. I took her in my arms and she was already loosing hair fast. Not 45 minutes ago she had goodbyed me at the door as I went to the supermarket. But as hours prolonged and my boyfriend's family came and cried for her as well (she was extremely loved by everyone) she became cold and rigid and curled like a small fluffy ball. I thank that I got to hold her and say goodbye...We buried her.

And this week, all cats I see on the street bring me to her, and she becomes the beacon of all things lost, all the broken thing in my life suddenly gather under her name, its too fast for the flesh to become the symbol, where is my marceline...Marceline... I want your name to be my cat and not this hurt...I miss you so...

I guess it's not the best chapter, but this one is dedicated for Marceline.
The lost children

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Music: My boy builds coffins- Florence and the Machine

It was a blur. He hadn't a chance to realize his own position. Killua was at his neck. Strangling- silence him- silence him. Strangling as he laughed and he felt each manic laughter rumble up the now bruised neck in the ring of his own pale hands. He realized he was a bloody mess and he was on killing mode- and yet the snigger through each punch, drawing blood, drawing more blood, his claw digging into flesh- he read the excitement in those eyes and a scalding white hatred flared to his fists and claws he punched that jaw and dug deep into that chest again and again-

"Are you selfish Killua Zoldick?!" And Killua lusted to kill and die but that last words he heard- "So you are going to kill me?"

He was

"You are eh? You are going to kill the only thing protecting Gon ah? Well draw more blood then…"

His heart stopped as if paralyzed… that moment he stopped breathing. But his own hands… they didn't.

... - ... - ... - ... - ... - ... - ... - ... - ... - ... - ... - ...

... - ... - ... - ... - ...

"IT'S SMOKING"

From afar it looked like a wide-eyed Gon was holding with difficulty his breath. He stared at the miniature sand volcano Leorio had done by the beach for him. It was actually just a common sand hill with a hollow base and a hole on its peak. The bright idea was to put inside a lit cigarette.

"If you want it to keep fuming, you need to put more flammable stuff to burn inside…it works like a small oven… You know, stuff like…newspapers, magazines or…” he looked around to the deserted elsewhere "…or dried leaves, you know"

"Help me gather some, we can make a volcano fort and-"

"No. I already did this one volcano Gon. Now's my nap time."

"aah, come on!"

...

Killua stared at them from a distance, sitting in the sand. He'd been observing ahead the playful leaps his stones drew against the sea surface for some time now. Gon was in charge of retrieving them when he ran out of the flat smooth ones. But the prick was still making a tantrum out of Leorio's denial. For his own amusement. That they shared… they liked to irk the elder one. They didn't notice
Kurapica behind his book observed them disturbed by the noise. The blond exhaled patience, put down the reading, stood up, and just as silently began gathering some dry leaves.

"Hey Killua, you ok there?" the doctor voiced out, trying to un-cling Gon from tumbling him. The albino gave thumbs up in that carefree manner he always had.

.

.

...

They'd left the ship. Him and Gon...

He looked ahead once more. Sand and sparkling sea.

There weren't any messages in his cell phone. None.

He threw another stone.

It didn't mean anything he told himself. The trust he'd had on his own security had been shattered. For his own good anyways. But he was free..._was_ he free? He felt on the run. He didn't dare open himself again to the idleness of before; _NO_. Unless he was sure it was all gone. All. Well, things weren't bad, the sudden threat that stripped him of what scarce things he had, it was suddenly over.

It just left him weary.

Gon …the golden boy didn't know what were the shadows inside his mind. But Gon knew. He sometimes left him alone. He sometimes engaged him on play or talk.

Sometimes Gon would submerge in the sea, and Killua would watch him from the shore, his feet buried in the warm sand. Gon's tanned body would appear and disappear in the ocean waves lapping and laughing. And he would detachedly think how he did not deserve this. Almost as an automatic afterthought he'd learned to obliterate through the years. Now recently disinterred. When those moments inhabited him, he found himself burying his hands in the sand and then cupping it, to see how it slipped away. All the golden grains would look red on the setting sun. As if tiny droplets of blood were sprinkled against the white skin.

In that image- hands cupping fleeing red - he'd once found endurance. Torture, training, even waiting on a long line, when his patience was tried, he repeated the idea it was right. It was the order of the world. The situation in which he was now with his haunting past...Well he'd been expecting the time he'd begin to pay. In terms of quantities he knew that all the pain his body or mind could endure would not ever clean him from the blood he'd shed.

The warmth of the sand against his knees, his hands, it felt soothing... _if he could tell them he'd never liked to kill. If he could tell them... if he could... if he could_. Each grain chanted. A stone like pressure weighed him down- yes it was true, he did feel the rush of euphoria as he sliced. Blood would spatter and he wouldn't stop, because he wanted more. He closed his eyes disturbed.

The flash of red as he finally had control over something in his life, the only time he could lose himself without feeling pain, the disproportionate family acclaim that followed did swell him as any child praised. If he could tell them that was all an illusion, always, always.

Loathing in thick waves the moments later, when he opened his eyes after the euphoria. How it had made him sick. The easy way out of the sickness was obliviousness. The tainting blood all over, the
heavy scent of death, the reality of what he and only he had done. The idea it'd only been his hand, and not anyone else's- ah the first time, he'd been unable to clench eyes shut he thought with a shadow of a smile.

He got ahold of the present

No fight would ever though…. Sentences were made and left undone like loose threads he'd tried to knot, to weave his life back-well, it was long overdue to open the discussion, it all untied to a scrambled mess now opened because of that visit, his reminder, the red splatter flash countermeasured whatever excuse at the attempt, his black words whispered to his ear over and over, they were true, and he arrived there, to their feet at the one and only realization he knew by heart.

All the slain were forever dead…

They would never come back …

Not even for their loved ones. Because they weren't anymore

Until eyes, life or lifeless gleam in the iris as an emotion strikes a body, or the dull yellowing fixed as death settles in- they would become nothing but differences in aspect, until meaning could not be placed at all in the divisor line. …

Someone must have once made him realize, someone must have told him when little, a different story, something that had stirred him to actually look at them when it all ended…Because the first times, when it was all over, he would stare onto the lifeless eyes, and would still try to place in their hollowness a meaning. Not able to grasp the fleeing idea that they were dead. How could he? How could they? How? concepts like forever and never …

He'd desperately tried to grasp the scene – as if memorizing details would undo the actions, would stuff a piece of them in him when they were no more, as if that would be a repairing small deed. The line he'd crossed when he'd stopped caring. Detachment. Slaying like painting, slaying like singing, the eerie silence in his mind the moment after. He felt nothing.

How there had been nothing else on his pathetic excuse of existence but that narrow escape to survive. How if he did not kill, all his existence was a failure, all he lived—all the pain he'd been put through was meaningless. He was a killer. He was born to be a killer.

That was how they'd been programming him no? He snorted. That's the logical operation he should had followed, had been expected to follow. Well, screw them; prefabricated molds had never worked for him.

But still no fight would ever…

Killing had been the first crack on the break… Surviving , molding and turning him into a monster… he'd woken one day with half the realization to escape which was enough, because if he'd stayed… what would have become of him… what? He hadn't realized his hands were fisted- What- With the years to turn into lifeless Illumi, only living when feeling that rush of euphoria, ah? Illumi was empty, empty, his body only came alive at the thrill, only when being cruel and wicked powerful when above others-he clenched his teeth, he bit his tongue. NO. He wouldn't sympathize with him, he wanted to think himself different from him, yes, he'd fallen into the trap of his own relentless mind. He hated to think that maybe, just maybe Illumi had been like him once…Deprivation of choice and -.

NO.
He cupped the sand feeling his heart was racing under the line of his neck. He'd never enjoy other's suffering, even if it meant his own life at stake. He'd enjoyed his fleeting freedom… but not their suffering. Gon had taught him that about him. He'd never... He'd never enjoy , never, someone else's pain ... not even at his hand...

He did like teasing preys though…. But that was as much as Zoldick as he could get.

He now had a choice… He embraced it so…..

(Do he? had he..?)

His brow had creased as dark thoughts took shapes he recognized. _He knew that, with time maybe those two dimensions could have morphed into one: in the euphoria reunited the freedom and the suffering of the slain… dark realms human nature tended to mingle pleasure, release and pain, dark pain and death, sick death and pleasure. People that liked and lived of the pain of others…a thick poison that was running through his veins like black tar , that he detected detachedly as anger ablaze, a drowning sense of injustice. But he'd lived... he'd survived on the pain of others for long years, long blurry years. He deserved to pay-he deserved to pay-he deserved to pay-

It was ironic that while some teenage might think something similar, in his case, actually the world _would_ be better place had he not been born- he thought detached. He appreciated the fact from afar, holding its truth to the light. He did try to ease thinking he was no president to have launched a nuclear bomb or dictator to start a holocaust were thousands died. He'd just been one, one amongst the human breed who'd slain a portion of the mingling in earth. Mingling-each of the kind unique and unable to replace. He owed them. _He deserved every ill fate he'd stumbled with_. He did. He knew he did. And still he wanted…freedom. He should not want. But he did… to keep on fighting… for… for...

Killua stood from the sand… he felt his feet leading him slowly into the sea. He felt himself loose again in his thoughts like trickling droplets… the water reached his waist…

He observed Gon. The boy talked to Leorio in the distance. Those tanned swift feet now dangled loosely of a tree branch suspended over the water as he spoke who knows what. His eyes reflected the glimmering water below. Their gazes crossed for a second. In which both looked away immediately.

Gon…he thought somehow longingly…

He'd escaped. All of that. Life had to be something else than taking others lives away and letting your soul die in exchange, he'd always thought impassively. He'd really escaped expecting to be disappointed- he would be disappointed- He knew the world was bad, was tough, but he wanted to live it, he wanted desperately to kill that one last hope he still had: That all had a meaning, that living was worth something. He wanted the final deception, the final excuse to let it all go, the final act… He from all people deserved to die, and the world out there would make sure to prove him right. He went away, crossed the door, took all in isolated steps, travelled, took the hunter exam out of boredom, oblivious of eyes, isolated of emotions, disengaged. Not expecting… rather delaying the sure return or…

...

Anything but this.

Existing in the world so much wickedness that should have discouraged him, so many evil that could have shown him he was right…
Well he’d met Gon…

He remembered his thought process back then: ”sure, why don't we follow this guy” he'd thought bored, not even amused, not even impressed. But then he had followed him, and then he had laughed like he'd been his age. Again. And again. It was bound to become a force of habit with the years until he became his age and- Then he'd found himself resetting and re-learning much of the values he’d been taught-and suddenly the world had become large, a vast land of amazing wonders, and suddenly he'd felt free and-

He could not understand. He couldn't. Why….why would that white-haired boy he barely recognized stand there staring at the sun from the sea… right there smiling at him... why was he allowed to be cared by someone… why did life place that boy besides someone who could make him breath, that could infuse life into the pointless carcass, that could actually make the body forget, that could actually make him just play-forever play, that always told him it hadn't been his fault, why was he given a second chance, he from all who was beyond redemption…

Why…

He... he had and answer...and it was grim. He let himself be submerged by the deep waters.

"Leooooriooo"

"What now"

Gon's figure lied long against the branch he'd chosen. Willowy, slender and made of a tar black bark, the arms of the tree extended hovering over the sea. Leorio turned to appreciate the boy in that upside down position he liked, stretching to touch the rippling surface. He remained quiet, as if upside down thinking.

Leorio was in a tight bathing suit thinking his body was gorgeous. His fashion at first, Gon knew, had made Kurapica's eyes bleed and Killua look away uncomfortable. When they'd been alone, he'd whispered all kinds of dark mockery in his ear. Right now though the doctor didn't look so fashionable. With a stick he prodded the water which reached his knees at that short distance from the shore line.

"Your glasses are not there" the tanned boy spoke observant.

Gon thought that something like a curse came from Leorio's muttering. "Again, wouldn't you kindly tell me GON where did you see them land...?" Kurapica and Leorio has put the island searching out-of-bounds for the boys. Payback for their ship dismissal. The kids were left in a position they couldn't argue one bit.

It was their boredom lashing back at the doctor right now . The black-haired devil refused yet again with his head-

"Leorio, watching you fumble is interesting" he observed curious.

"Sure sure- let's throw Leorio's glasses. Let's bother the elder of the group. You're catching some of Killua's tendencies” Leorio snapped "Well I don't see a THING"

"Don't worry Leorio –san, if you are about to step on them, I'll tell you"

Leorio waved him away angered. At this Gon seemed to resume his musings, which seemed located at the sea line's distance.
"…Leorio?" he murmured idly.

The doctor turned in the water with disbelief.

"So now you're going to tell me where?" But Gon was shaking his head.

"No. Ok. Err… how do you know when you're in love?"

He cut Leorio's pacing.

A light pink immediately tinged Gon cheeks as he immediately turned in his branch upright again "I mean… I'd ask someone more proper... had I Mitosan… and you know... I was just curious, the other day we saw a movie... and it's all over the song hits and TV and I just wondered...how exactly one knows one loves another person? But you know...just a passing thought"

Leorio sat in a rock.

"Well it can be quite confusing" the doctor pointed out.

"Everyone seems to think that way. It feels like half the people out there think they are in love when they're not, and the other half hasn't realized they are until it's too late."

Leorio somehow sensed where this was going. He exhaled, keeping in mind to settle simple things for the younger one "well, first of all there are many kinds of 'loving' you can feel for another person…” Gon assented as if truly absorbing every word "many kinds of loving" he murmured.

That didn't make it for the doctor easier. He proceeded "I mean, for example, I love you guys, you're like my family" Leorio smiled as he sat on a rock, still prodding the water but delay he suddenly realized how sincere that had come up. Thank goodness Kurapica wasn't near.

"You are sort of my family too" Gon looked away shrugging "my bestest family, Leorio. Along with Kurapica-and aunt Mito and Killua. But other times my family has been Wingsan and Zushi and Killua, but he'd say that Biscuit almost- well and there's Kaito- I mean... and well there's Tzetsugera…” his murmur became fainter and fainter

Gon sure was a bit confused as to what the tag "family" meant the doctor noted…But all of a sudden Gon swung in a loop resuming his upside down position " Well, there it is Leorio, the problem. There are too many kinds of love and too many kinds of loving, ain't it? How do people in the movies know they are in love? Because the script says so? Like how the nurse treating Killua knew she was in love- or-"

"Whoa, stop there, she wasn't in love boy!"

"Well, she sure was all weird with him." Gon doubted.

"She just had a crush. Billions of galaxies of difference" Leorio emphasized. .

"Crush" Gon repeated. "Well how did you know, Leorio that you were in love the first time you felt like that? Or you only just…er… crushed?"

The doctor laughed heartily. For a moment he thought how evident it was that these two hadn't mingled with kids their age. They 'd grown in an adult world playing to be adults. And now they were growing... But then, what had ever been normal about the lives of the four of them in the first place? He tried recalling.
"Well… I didn't know. I definitely remember I didn't know at the time… "He trailed off. Painful memories etched to his eyes suddenly.

Gon looked ahead at the horizon, still lost.

"But then you knew? Like with…er... time?"

"I guess… but Gon you know? At the moment though, even though I hardly knew what I was feeling, it didn't matter anyways. It still doesn't matter much. I think being in love is just a label you can do without as long as you know what you want and who do you want to be with, and how much, how intense is that need in you …"he shrugged. A sort of balming melancholy coated his words. They weren't right he knew. Gon's eyes bore a shade of trouble.

"That was not exact, but still, nice" Kurapica had stepped in on them in some white Bermudas and loose white top. "They sound though like wise words enough. Strange thing is they come from what I usually believe a dirty mouth, Leorio. Here, I found your toothbrush"

"Heeey I was missing it!"

"Kurapica wait! Don't step! "

The shriek wasn't able to halt him on time as a crack was heard. Leorio cringed as if a beer bottle had broken somewhere even though it was a tiny snap. A hulk fiery glare was shot towards Gon. He averted it, already at Kurapica’s foot, searching in the water

"Look! The glasses aren't broken! Only the bridge is..." he lifted the piece. But his gaze had stopped at the patch of Leorio's forehead where an egg could be boiled.

"Ooops"

That reaction definitely did not help.

"Here Kurapica! Take this" the broken glasses were cupped on the blonds' hand as Gon vanished underwater from sight, as fast as an eel. His face reappeared over the surface of the water thirty meters away.

"SOORRRRY! SO SORRY!"

Aaaand he'd submerged again.

Kurapica looked at Leorio with amused regret.

Leorio was about to spring a chase. But he broke it with a sigh. He tried to normalize his sudden anger, passing a hand through his hair.

He noticed Kurapica seemed a bit pale and tired. "I'm terribly sorry" he offered politely the broken pieces.

Leorio sighed, stretching "I'll have to fix them"

"The guys or the glasses?"

"Definitely both"

Kurapica let out a crystal clear laughter. Leorio had to look up. The blond sighed unaware "Do I have to be your head always? Reminder: you can't see a bloody thing at near sight. Good luck fixing
"Right!" Leorio sighed. He gave an accusing glare to the traces left on the water in Gon's direction. "Good that you keep your vocabulary in front of our buds"

The blond laughed lightly. "I will fix them for you, be patient..." he shrugged easily. His expression guarded "it's just I need to do something first..."

Leorio's silence was unexpectedly hard but he didn't look up from the broken monocles. If the doctor hadn't known the kuruta well he would have gone ahead and asked "is it regarding the spider? Are they near as they were before? Are we in danger? Will you let me help this time...?"

But no.

Ok. He knew the hostage exchange at Yorkshin had been for him the hardest to bear. He didn't want Killua and Gon involved. He didn't want anyone involved at all...ever again... Something rooted within his friends since years past...

He still directed a glacial look to Kurapica's side.

"Very well. Remember though we need to speak to Killua..."

Kurapica's look wavered down. "I bear it in mind." A silence settled between them. Both thinking about their last conversation on the subject...

"it's just suppositions " Leorio's voice lowered

"but he was hurt"

"he was hurt..."

A small silence

"But... he seems better... look at that" Kurapica pointed. Seemingly trying to divert him from darker thoughts.

The doctor welcomed the diversion... He held awkwardly one glass in front of his eyes as an old English gentleman, and he looked in the direction Kurapica's gaze was held. It was just to pose. He only needed those for close sight. He did feel gorgeous in his bathing suit.

"I used to do exactly the same thing as a kid" the blond murmured with a faint smile. He actually seemed caught away.

He saw Gon and Killua in the distance. They somehow had managed to wear the goggles they'd given for lost at the sea's bed. He tuned in to the afar laughter and chatter.

"As –pa –ra-gus" Gon stated "you were saying the one food you hate along with chili peppers."

"Oh Gosh Gon, you are amazing" the albino spoke monotonely

"Really?"

The hint of hope to his voice never ceased to amuse him.

"No" he said unaffected "I was saying 'as-retard-as-you' The faintest of smirks itched upwards the corner of his mouth
Gon took him in. His expression.

"Liar. Liii-aaar. You made that up right now"

"No, I'm not that smart. And you can't tell always when I lie" Killua shrugged easily smiling with that carefree air he always carried "Besides you do look like a retard spelling underwater. Everyone probably does so no offense"

"Ass" Gon snapped. He tried to hold his ground. "You might call me retard but I'm not the ridiculous one with a shirt swimming” he giggled lightly trying to bring laughter to the pale countenance "Man take that off"

"It's my favorite shirt Gon!” he said affectedly with a hand to his heart "I hadn't been able to use it since it was lost in our dirty laundry for so long”

Gon was the one in charge of the laundry, so that was a subtle accusation.

His scars were but lines now but he would still be prudent. "Besides, girls love it" he winked like a winner to the imaginary public

"Girls like abs" Gon pointed wisely

"Well they're right here. Sticking to my wet shirt" he emphasized. "Se-xy" he smacked his lips.

Gon tried not to think on how the words perfectly emphasized his hypnotizing gesture. He shook his head to clear thoughts away, how had they stooped at that topic? he thought aloud.

"We are pitiful. We are completely alone in this island Killua. Not a single soul will care if we play or drown” Gon said miserable

"Worst. We're stuck to those two boring adults" and he lowered his voice "they are staring at us G"n"

"LETS PLAY" Gon let out with a hint of desperation.

"What, lip-reading under water again?"

"Well, you can't deny I was really close Killua, like "as-pa-ra-gus" and "as-retard- what was it you said again?” he caught a hidden smirk on Killua "No, you can't fool me as before, you made it up!"

"No"

"Let's settle in a tie."

"Nope" he crossed his arms.

"Come on! It's a tie!"

"Learn to take a no, Gon"

"A tie it is. My turn! SIX SILLABLES"

"A tie won't do- hey!"

Gon had submerged in the water
Killua dived back furiously "YOU SC-" his voice was swallowed by the sea.

"Lip reading..." Kurapica had murmured to himself. Well, the game had turned now more into who drowned the other first. Leorio was laughing to his regret "they are SO bored! So you had a lake, when you lived with your clan then? I lived in a town by the sea! Maybe you lived near a sea as well, or well, some kind of water formation you know like-"

The doctor had stopped suddenly. He'd been almost talking to himself. And he almost bit his tongue out. He knew whatever comment would be preceded by a lack of answer. He knew long before the extended silence.

And he hated to be in that situation. Again. As if talking to a wall. What kind of relationship was that?

Kurapica forced a faint smile without meeting the doctor's gaze.

"He… does seem fine" the blond trailed.

Leorio sighed "he does. He always does"

Kurapica waved a quiet goodbye. He probably had known exactly what was going through the doctor's mind.

He cursed at the blond, staring at the monocles in his hands. Feeling helpless. Damn him.

Kurapica mused as he stepped with decision further and further away from the scene. He knew what Leorio felt about their journeys since the first encounter. They'd grown together these years- they'd been just teenagers (maybe they still were…) Them travelling together, the two in that unspoken tension they both acknowledged and liked, the four in an almost family semblance- the one they all were seeking it seemed.

But it wasn't. Not for him. This wasn't his family, it would never be, he'd already had one. He did not want to have another one. Or lose it. Leorio had been wrong, they were not family and though it had sounded helpful and poetic at the moment for Gon, he was wrong, tags were necessary -if relationship were necessary at all beyond strategic use.

And as to them…

He'd settle with 'friends for now' without flinching at his own coldness.

…

…That didn't meant he owed them.

He did.

That meant he preferred their safety at a distance, than their help and closeness, their unnecessary danger.

He'd begun walking away, back to the woods.

He did stare back at the laughter. And old fondness. He'd been so similar to Gon… once…

Well…if he had to bear any tags- and bear it was- 'Best friends' did suit better...
And as ever Kurapica was nowhere to be found. They were running, and quite relentlessly through the woods. They jumped easily from tree to tree as if the wind held their weight. All senses alert, the stance of a crouching tiger as they ran.

How it'd come to this?

It all had started about some hours after the asparagus fight. Leorio was taking his nap—finally—in his words-. Killua had shortly joined his side in their improvised tent. He'd refused to take out his already dried shirt. Even though he felt safe by the doctor's side ... Despite the heat inside he smothered himself into a fevered slumber beside the doctor's loud snores.

Gon, though himself quite an independent being, at times found difficult the task of being on his own. It was only at particular times, like when he sensed trouble. He'd lasted half an hour before squatting in front of the foot that prodded from the tent's door with indecision.

He finally pulled it.

"Killua!" he tried in a low voice.

If it hadn't been for the urgency in his eyes the assassin would have kicked him out. After all, he'd fallen asleep at five am that very same day just on disturbing thoughts. He wanted to be knocked away from earth for a while. So he did not move. But after some seconds he did raise his head conceding attention— with regret.

Gon looked at him with determination That meant incoming news.

"…what"

"Kurapica is missing"

"…and the grass is green Gon. Tell me something new" Killua groaned the answer to his pillow. Still lying in his tummy.

"He's been missing for three hours" Gon emphasized. His impatience leveraged to an edge. But still he did not add further.

"… Again. Tell me something new" the albino did not even raise his head. Gon knew he was trying to irritate him on purpose, but now wasn't the time for that.

"Killua I..." he tumbled into the tent, bringing inside the sand film in his feet. His features gracefully fleetted between determination and doubt, as if hesitating to share what he knew or to act on his own. He picked up a hushed tone.

"Ok. …I saw one of them. " he let out.

Leorio gave a sudden loud snore and turned to give them his back.

"Them" Gon always admired how his friend ever so subtly shifted to sharp alertness. His eyes were open an assessing. "Which one did you see?" the practical enquiry.

"The lavender hair woman"

"Machi is her name" To the silence he added "back at Yorkshin I did my homework"

"So they are here, in the woods. Maybe they are watching us right now" Gon let out the urgency he'd been holding.
"Yes" Killua remained thoughtful.

"He might be-

"In trouble yes. He's outnumbered" the albino let out impassively. He knew his stance irked the honey eyed impulsivity.

"Then let's go immediately, he's already gone for too long- let's carry out the plan I told you"Gon grabbed his wrist unexpected. Killua flinched back startled. Having nightmares always made him hyper-vigilant. With skill he smoothly disguised his own start in an attempt to stop Gon. This was always necessary anyways.

"Hold on."

"Killua, we must be quick" Gon's eyes were darkening like when they angered.

"Gon. Take a moment" Killua rested his eyes on the honey colors

"…Gon… he's always been outnumbered" There was a silence. "He knew that perfectly well since the first day he settled into his personal quest. He knew this when he left us today, and he left like that for a reason" His eyes conveyed the rest of the line - *He did not want us there.*

"…"Gon looked down. His hands fist. Hurt in his eyes. Suddenly he looked ahead trying to hold his own emotions from rising. But they glared out to Killua again with a force meant to punch the line out of the albino's face.

"Are you serious?!" Gon stopped to look at Killua feeling disbelief at what he implied-not to get involved just because they had been rejected... It irked him further. He tried to hold his breath steady as his words flew swift. "Killua, if you hadn't noticed-if you ever notice- we forced him to leave the ship. It was our fault. Leorio and him, they're almost acting like babysitters but we aren't children anymore! This encounter was not on his plans! I do not even know how the phantom brigade followed up but but- he was even targeted in the cruise that we organized for him when he was supposed to be on vacation, and we're bailing out because he is trying to protect us, and because of THAT we won't help HIM?! How coward can we-"

His shoulders were taken.

"Shoo. We are helping him. I never doubted that" Killua cut him slickly. One side of Gon's brain registered marvel at how impassively Killua took his anger. Always. The boy had swiftly given him his back and began searching for his sneakers.

"I am at least because I want to help. But Gon again, you're aware it's not your responsibility right? Don't feel indebted or-"

It was funny that he was the one giving this speech. He was interrupted

"Care to explain then why aren't we running?" Gon clenched his jaw.

"We just need to see how, Gon." Killua had finally raised his voice a little. Gon suddenly assented. Suddenly he felt safe by Killua's side. *With him they'd surely get Kurapica out alive*

"As things are, we'll blow it if we are rash." Killua stopped to look at the tangled loops of knots in his sneakers.

"But he's gone for too long for us to predict anything, we have to hurry- and Oh why! You never
change! Hand them" Gon took the sneakers from his hands and with skill began unknotting the messy state of Killua's shoe laces as he spoke " and then what do you suggest- God , I don't even know how you do this" he lowered his voice at the last.

"That's how my shoes never come off in battles, unlike your boots"

"That's just strategy-don't divert me Killua" he demanded.

"Well, if they let you see them, they probably want us to follow. Thus it must be a trap"

"Yes, I thought you'd say so, but I'm not that sure. I don't know if they knew I was looking. I was hidden… here, one" he handed the first sneaker

"So you didn't see them here, at the camp?"

Gon's eyes flashed with guilt- he'd been searching for them. Killua rolled his eyes.

"They were still watching you for a reason" Killua's eyebrow rose.

"It probably has to do with the strategic use of a hostage interchange. But we won't get caught this time, not with the plan I told you" Gon reassured hurried.

"It's a very lousy plan" Killua muttered under his breath as he was handed the other sneaker that the next second was dexterously relaced on his foot with thousand knots.

"It is not. The two of us have a fair amount of chance of trapping one of them, now that we've grown stronger. One between the two should be easy. Or at least manageable, depending on which one"

"Remember. First thing is finding Kurapica. If we find one of them first, ok, but our goal is helping him"

Gon growled a quick reply in his way out of the tent. Kilua smirked. He wouldn't put to words the fact that every time someone looked down on Gon the boy felt this rush to prove himself like fire- and Kurapica had left them at the camp. That, added to the -we-need-to-save-everybody-complex- and Gon's intolerance to see pain in others and you got the deal. He knew Gon was aware of this issues. He knew Gon knew Killua was aware of this, and he knew Gon wouldn't stop despite.

"Gon, if given the chance, we are only targeting one, don't forget. More, we run"

....

And that's how he now was in another chase.

He felt the strong bark of a tree against his elbow as he ran through the forest maze. The plan was to capture one of them, and, once taken as a hostage, force the entire phantom brigade to leave the island. Gon's words had been that at least like that they would stop their chase on Kurapica for some time on the threat of damaging the member they would have captured. They would give them the prize of its release and freedom if they left them alone.

Gon would trust on the spider's word of course, once the agreement was settled. The phantom brigade would leave the island and leave them alone for the time being.

He even trusted they wouldn't retaliate first.

Killua sighed. That was the way Gon thought the world worked. With honor and justice.
So many dangers. They didn't even know the policies of the group. Maybe they didn't care about losing limbs of their own. There were too many un-assessed factors.

Like a lightning flash he remembered Kuroro's dark eyes that rainy day at the alleyway, Machi fastening her hold on them. It'd been terrible, yet thrilling. Killua oddly felt that whenever else the naïve trust might have failed at Gon's company it never seemed to fail, not him. Honor and justice did follow him. Well... to the date.

How would Kurapica take it, he mused. He'd use the hostage to extract valuable information...for him. Without hesitation.

And he'd hold a grudge to them just for interfering.

Would they be able to capture a spider in the first place? For hell, why was he doing this? because he was bored? because he did want to help Kurapica, as Kurapica had helped Gon get to the Zoldick mansion to retrieve him...

Gon signaled as the speed took his image in a sharp turn, and then ahead again. Beyond their line of vision, a dash of Machi's lavender hair disappearing. It was a trap he knew, but they would willingly step right into it, they'd settled, wouldn't they, wouldn't—

The world turned over in a blur as he was seized at too much speed. He swayed upside down, hanging from one invisible thread right into a tree with full force. Ouch. In his peripheral vision Gon was caught and hung from one of his boots as well.

"Gotcha" Machi walked into the clearing underneath staring at her dangling preys. "I thought you would lower your sensitivity to Nen in favor of speed"

How cute of her.

...  
He realized his heart was beating loudly. Nanny had told him that meant he was scared. But he had a tight control over his body. If not, he would be sweating, or inhaling short breaths—that scared. But he was an impassive mask. He tried to apply what he'd learned—never leave the target out of sight—never let yourself be seen by others... Be swift as the wind, unseen as a shadow.

He hated when things got out of the plan. And that so scarcely happened in his up to now carefully traced hunts.

He knew his own dexterity and handled it like the known barrel of your own private gun.

But he was doubting. They hadn't told him yet what happened when there were others in the scene. He'd heard and been taught to let no one alive. But he wasn't meant to train for that kind of situations yet. He was still just in silent was the silent executioner, the angel of dark wings at the bedpost...

Worst—he'd gathered information he wasn't the only one chasing the target. Which was what made him the most uneasy. That was highly a situation he hadn't been taught or prepared for.

But he couldn't come out empty-handed like a child. He observed as taught.

He'd been spying his prey... a greasy fat business man, a wine belly pouring out of his undone shirt, pink slippers. The scene at the penthouse was lighted and intimate, a slender pale woman veiled by
curtains laughing at each comment the man-made, funny or not.

He’d been about to attack. Father always remembered him their targets were never honorable... (and he’d never asked for their own family honor for that matters…) The family took pride on their job, on their name, on their spotless skill... He knew at heart nanny thought otherwise. That was a subject never to be spoken. But...he wouldn’t fail them.

The more he spied from his position, perched and hidden from a window, the more he began to hate the man. He thought much had to do with the fact he was just his target. That wasn’t right, he knew very well. He’d been told thousands of times he shouldn't give space to any emotional link at all with the target. None. There was a reason why these mingling were preys. There was also a reason why they were predators. They were stronger and had the right given by that strength. He repeated this in his mind.

He observed and realized, as she turned, that the woman was actually a girl. She was probably four years older, no more than twelve. She was not dressed as such. He did not know what it meant but he did know it was something wrong. She didn't seem to act as wrong as it felt to look at. She seemed thrilled to be on the expensive gown she was. She turned like a ballerina in front of a huge mirror, her gown flowed to her ankles. She seemed thrilled about the champagne and the diamond ears she’d been given. Her own full lips parted beautifully when she laughed, painted red against the pale skin. She only seemed not as happy when the man took her by the waist or touched her shoulder. She seemed to stiffen at his touch. At the same time Killua thought he reckoned in her more familiarities: she seemed to be acting a well studied script, where she kept at all means her face pleasant and smiling behind the rigid muscles. The huge man kissed her with a greasy moustache and she opened her mouth leaning stiffly, yet studying her movements. Her eyes...her blue grey eyes at the moment were the picture of sadness. Veiled.

He observed everything as taught.

He studied this scene for long enough to know the exits, to know his means of attack, and how long it would take.

But no one had told him what to do with someone not of age.

He felt unsettled. He tried to reassure himself this was an easy task. He felt himself slowly slipping into the chilling lack of empathy... that emptiness at the task done-one that he knew nanny would abhor if shown- but it was necessary, he'd been taught.

As silent as a night shadow he'd crossed distance between buildings. He now found himself perched at their window sill. His body occupied so little space... The man had told the girl to wait patiently on the bed, and then he entered the bathroom. Like an obedient child, she sat in the middle of the mattress, her legs dangling from the edge, crossed underneath her flowing gown.

Just a shadow of a city light, he entered. He observed from his angle before he took a step and let his presence be known.

She just stared at the younger boy.

She knew better than to scream. The girl just studied him.

He was counting vital seconds detachedly as he suddenly found himself speaking.

"Um... If you want to live, go out that door now" He pointed hesitantly. What was he doing?

She rose an eyebrow and he felt like a child.
As if a move he'd done a thousand times before, Killua, dangling upside down, used force of impact to sway like a swift pendulum against the tree trunk. Skillfully he gave himself impulse.

"No, you're not going anywhere" Suddenly a thousand threads threatened to strangle his foot halting him. Like ivy vines the threads began creeping downward his dangling body. Lines crept up his knees.. up his thighs. He disliked the feeling in the pit of his stomach.

"Why do you want us eh? " Killua let out daring smile "only half of you guys came to the island or even less. Shouldn't you all be chasing the chain bastard?" He knew Gon had inwardly flinched at the name. Machi eyed him- daring, the eyes of another killer. She would attack.

He felt the known thrill pulsing up his spine. So indeed only some had come up here. They'd had the bet with Gon. Just as Machi jumped to probably show her core attack he called out. They wouldn't give her the chance. "Gon!"

Killua swiftly grabbed his own threaded foot just as Gon on his own dangling thread loosened his green boot and fell to the ground free. Machi had already thought of that and aimed yet another binding thread at Gon but missed at Gon's speed. She did not miss the albino's devious smile, his hands on his own foot, over the Nen threads. She jumped ahead

And then, like a lightning bolt, all went white.

Killua had Nen electrified them both. Machi receiving the shock jumped back releasing the Nen connection. He was free and fell just as Gon kicked her full-blown in her back. It was never honourable, two to one. She returned the maneuver with skill, sending Gon to a tree flying. His friend's body for a moment spread eagle against the trunk that broke with the force of impact.

Killua could not linger on the image, he was already at her neck. Machi's hand had dived into Killua's gut, with dagger eyes - when another lightning bolt surged through her body.

He knew he'd induced superhuman high voltage right into her brain. He felt her go limp in between his hands coldly. Her body fell forward to the ground as he felt the last bits of stinging energy down his fingertips. Unconscious.

He relished the lack of guilt. She was an assassin just as him. Maybe he would have killed her if she hadn't a strategic use… hostage exchange.

A silence suddenly settled on the woodlands.

"That was easy" Gon unscrambled himself from the mess. He went to Machi's unconscious body, clearing the bits of tree bark he had from his beating. "I didn't even get to fight" he said disappointed.

"That was too easy." Killua didn't linger in his friend's bruises, Gon noticed he was still detached in a wolf stance. He spoke in a low voice. "It's not over yet." He whispered. "And Kurapica hasn't shown up as we'd predicted." They should run with that unconscious body before-

But Gon tensed, suddenly hearing something wrong faraway. Birds flying…
And then all happened too fast. Gon felt a simultaneous wheezing sound just below his chin as he was thrown to the ground. He fell the air leave his lungs with the impact, Killua's body on top. Killua had pushed him down as a thousand Nen bullets pierced the forest scene just above their heads. He felt an odd pulsing at the neck skin under his ears, a superficial wound. He realized one of Killua’s hands had unconsciously flown to press against it, stopping the blood with his palm. The gesture was gentle yet almost unaware as he checked his surroundings in all alerts, crouched over the tanned boy as the bullets flew over their heads.

Suddenly his eyes met honey.

"You okay?" urgency widening his violet irises.

Gon raised one eyebrow: Seriously?

Killua's eyes lingered on him a second longer than necessary … And he rolled them over so that now they were behind some bushes.

Him and Killua, they were horrible people. Gon thought this because he saw the albino bit his lip, and he knew why. They were enjoying the thrill. They meant to help Kurapica with all their hearts but he couldn't deny it, playing their lives to the edge, and the feeling that together they could beat them all and rock and roll- it rushed through his –their–spines. He was getting the old Killua back.

Their bodies a blur as they recovered their stance, and on account of one glance jumping ahead. Dodging bullets, fighting with brilliance, having fun, to get the world.

... Well it'd gone wrong.

No surprise here.

He'd had this feeling before when as a child, a mission failed. But now it was costly...

It'd gone wrong...It wasn't meant to be like this. As he stared up from his bindings Killua thought emptily, a gun pressed to his knee.

Gon

Chapter End Notes

A/N: hello guys...long time...

I'm sorry... I really am sorry for keeping you waiting so much...u.u

...ok... So, I became too depressed to write at a moment in my life... and then when I summoned the effort to continue (in truth I'm still depressed, but I've got to keep working and studying and stuff...) well I was renting a room where I hadn't internet. It's been tough. I'm not going through a good moment in my life... and that's just...sad, and lonely and sort of despairing.
Because it's been so long, I have prepared three chapters in a row to treat you. That is why this chapter isn't much. I could publish them the same day but then I thought that maybe that wouldn't be as fun for you. So I'll wait two days or something in between each chapter so you can swallow in doses.

Whenever I traveled and my boots went through the puddles of pouring rain or they skipped the stairs of buses I thought of you readers, whoever you are… I do thank you… I don't know what is the meaning of my own writing and as to why do I do it, but my worst brooding is brought down by a few things... along with them the reality of you, small bunch, out there just reading. Reading your reviews is unique; I always try to imagine the person behind it. Many of you have left private messages or questions. You are a sure lot, but I will reply to you all. I thank you for reading me. Writing... it does sustain me...

Longest A/N ever. I reach out to you though... humbled... thanks and sorry...
At first her eyes had mocked his appearance, and Killua realized she was taller. Then the dark blue orbs had stopped at his claw. A sudden realization struck—still to his silver hair and her eyes had widened. She opened and closed her mouth in silence.

"Out" Killua commanded her tired.

She fell to her knees surprising him.

"Please no!.. please wait for him to give me the money. Please..." She was older by some years only. He observed her... Both could have gone to the same school. Had their lives been normal.

He tried to remain straight and imitate his brother's cold menacing mask...

"Leave. Now" his voice... it sounded so small. He was loosing valuable seconds. Her eyes brimmed in tears but he did not comprehend this with what they called empathy. He had begun consequential planning as he took in the room; Still, still his voice seemed to soften though as if in a parallel track to his mind.

"Please, leave.. you must leave now."

She shook her head aggressively

"You don't understand!"

"You don't understand either!" he now spat back irritated "Just go!" His hand had automatically raised to her neck, knelt as she was. She gazed at his predator claws. Her eyes trailed from his hands to the faint scars in the arms, to his pale collarbone to finally meet his eyes. Her wandering gaze changed. It was... comprehensive "You... your life...must be lonely..."

"STOP"

She shook her head as if rephrasing " your life will be lonely...as mine..." a sense of foreboding to her words, inked to her sad big orbs.

A lash of anger possessed him, and suddenly his claw had drawn a single horizontal line across her neck as he growled. It was superficial and yet her eyes had changed as swiftly from understanding to horror, sheer horror-struck by that line.

"There you have" he spat "GO" she was diverting probably with talk, those who trained him were right, she should have died long ago, she was practically begging to, he felt the anger lashing out as the girl backtracked in fear. Her eyes had welled again in tears...

"Monster..."
He turned to the bathroom

"Stop! I'm sorry! I beg you! stop!" She took his hand. "Please! I need the money!" she yelped helplessly. "and he's but a human!"

"LEAVE" he roared, swatting er off as if a mosquito.

"I can't!" her fists clenched, her tears spilling " I c-can't! I ne- I need the money!- I'll be killed if-"

But before another word was muttered, the dormitory's room banged open.

The door turned down to splinters of wood flying across at all directions. She was stunned.

Immediately, men dressed in dark clothes marched inside. They covered their faces, they had fearsome guns, and quite swiftly spotted and aimed their weapons at the girl. She stared in utter shock at them. She found herself frantically searching back and forth her first apparition... helpless...

But Killua had disappeared an entire second before they'd even opened the door. He'd actually jumped to the ceiling and to a corner, crouching in the shadows over the top of a dresser. He knew no man was accustomed to look up when looking for someone. He knew the shadows would hide him as well... He knew he could be swift- he could even try to kill them all-at least he had done this in simulations-kill as many as possible...

But this was not in the plan. At the moment Killua had not a clue about how react. What was the protocol to follow in these situations? He couldn't help but staring. And staring, all he saw was the helpless girl.

"WITH WHOM WHERE YOU TALKING?!"

"I-"

"WHERE IS HE?" one of the men, roared as ten men behind trooped up to action, searching the penthouse. They soon torn open the bathroom and dragged out the man from the shower. He came squirming and yelling in fear, just like that, naked.

"His eyes were open like saucers "wait" he spoke feeble wrapping his arms as if for protection to his naked wet skin "wait WAIT WAIT!"

There was no mercy in the men who tied his wet slimy arms at his back roughly. The fahsion was a way Killua had been taught as well.

"who else is with you" the leader took a step forward

"No one! I swear! Please! Mercy! I'll pay-" he pouted, his eyes bulging.

Some of the crew seemed to laugh. The leader took a step forward, his weapon lodging to the still greasy wet forehead.

"Are the other's with you"

The bottom lip of the fat naked businessman puckered, and Killua thought he looked like a fish. An ugly sad slimy fish, mouthing out of water.

"answer!"

"NO, it's just that rented fuck and me!"
The girl was wriggling in the grasp of other men.

"See, the problem is I can't believe any word you say."

Such amateurs...thought Killua. Well, he'd been an amateur himself and now he was in trouble ...

The man screamed dramatically "NO NO, WAIT, I HAVE MONEY, AND I CAN GIVE YOU VALUABLE INFORMATION, YOU CAN HAVE THE GIRL AND-

The leader interrupted him by giving the group behind a sign

"shoot out all alive, be sure to live no one in the penthouse hiding"

Mayhem exploded.

Bullets flown everywhere breaking spattering into torn vases, mirrors, pillows. Killua barely realized he'd sprung forward when in a frantic run the girl's chest was hit. Her body was sent backwards as if crossed by a spear. She violently hit the mattress. On her back she guttered in blood for help, her eyes squeezed shut in pain. She got up on one arm to flee with what she had. Another bullet sunk in her skull with a dull thud. She fell like a doll to one side of the bed.

Killua felt the bullets sizzling by and realized he was paralyzed. He hadn't even realized a looming shadow hovered in front of him.

Until he was pushed back to the corner with force.

Illumi.

Crouching and giving Killua his back. He'd assumed his predator stance. Somehow all the bullets that could have reached him ricocheted at the assassins presence. Somehow even though men gazes passed swiftly over their entire room, they didn't seem to see them.. He didn't even feel Illumi's presence... though he was there right in front of him as a shield. He could only stare from the angle his shoulder left to look at the face of the girl. He thought on how the last bullet on the girl's corpse only had one entry wound which he now stared and stared. He didn't know what to make of it. He knew it was messy work, bloody work- he'd been taught to shed as little blood as possible...

Behind the broken angles of her body, her haunting image was still spinning at the mirror in her flowing gown, like a ballerina.

The many needles in his brother's hands were thrown in one straight run. Just as they interred each cranium, the messy shooting ceased. A clatter of guns dropping d and bodies falling to the floor was heard.

All the men lay dead.

An ominous silence settled oh so sudden. It blanketed the crisscrossed bodies...the suited black, the naked man shredded and unrecognizable drilled by a hundred bullets, the smaller body over the bed, the blood dousing the sheets.

It was eerily quiet.

Illumi, with a cellphone took a picture of the scene, then jumped artfully down. He took a picture of the body of the businessman and resend it. Killua knew it was to father.

He was going to ask why but the question stuck in his throat... He hadn't been able to save her. He
shouldn't have wanted to in the first place. He was afraid. He was really afraid. He'd done all wrong, he'd done all wrong, it'd all gone wrong… But… he'd been… Illumi had…

"Killua go home. I will finish this affair" Illumi did not turn his back. It was one of his cold commands. He instantly knew he'd failed him.

and yet…Killua swallowed.

…Illumi had saved his life.

"Aniki…"

The elder looked back with empty eyes…

…

He could only think of Gon. That wasn't practical. *He could only think of Gon.* Gee. They'd separated and this, this had been deadly wrong. It was pointless to dwell on -he thought coolly, his time was limited. It all still weighed heavily on his guts. His mind kept and kept going back at him.

Gon had immediately jumped at that emissor firing machine, dodging his every bullet with incredible speed.

Whale Island probably knew that the Frankenstein's Nen bullets would be limited. Killua followed without question; He knew Gon planned on making the monster spend all his ammunition in dodging. He almost certainly planned on getting frighteningly close and using Jan ken pon. That was when Killua would step in just in time to divert their enemy for Gon's to attack to work. That'd been his-their intent in unspoken words, done in just two exchanged glances.

But that's when a dash materialized to retrieve Machi's body and Killua froze. The body they should had focused on the first place. It was their hostage.

A hazel haired boy stared dead on at Killua. He recognized him as one named Shalnark because of the queer bat cell phone. They'd exchange glances for instants when his opponent disappeared. Where-

Shalnark reappeared above him in an ambush. He tried something on him he couldn't figure out because he'd electrified him back the instant he was touched, his claw grazing his arm. The youth just as quickly had released Killua, allowing one second of admiration.

And disappeared. Machi's body wasn't on the forest's ground. Shalnark had retrieved her.

Realization of the spider's speed hit him after he was running behind the hazel blur. Always chasing the target - *lessons engraved in his mind* – and Machi's body was the hostage, they should be fleeing, not fighting so he'd retrieve it back and then they would run, I'd be done in seconds. They had parted ways with a signal as his friend danced under the rain of bullets. He danced and danced to the enemy's song…

*He'd left Gon.*

...

Well it'd been the wrong choice.

...
They'd set Killua up.

So tight was the iron thread around him it cut on his shoulders. He refused to enter the guilt trip. Not now. Gon was probably fine on his own.

"Answer"

He looked above at the myriad of light blue and dense treetops, and replied easily, unfeeling of the cold metal barrel against his knee cap.

"Machi is it? I do not want my leg blown off. I'll be of help as I can provide. But I can't help wondering what benefit would bring to damage the hostage you've got with so so much effort" Killua murmured smoothly, a silver risen eyebrow. His violet eyes impassive and dangerous, slick like the sharp edge of a knife brushing skin, Shalnark observed unnoticed.

Killua knew using her name gave him some control into the situation. He knew it created the resentment in her dark eyes. She already had a lip bleeding and a fractured rib of the boy's own making.

Machi remained impassive. Her eyes bore a different kind of danger, that of a savage animal unleashed. It struck as a disparity to her expressionless face. Her low voice slicing "You'll bit your tongue the moment the bullet is seething inside your guts" she spoke emotionless, pressing the gun harder. "and your bastard friend won't hear you scream for help, nor will he know the state you're in until returned." She weighed lead unto every word. "And this time" her voice lowered "he hasn't got Danchou"

Something ominous burned underneath her cool dead stare. Killua could read a greater reason behind her motives. It would not leave space for negotiation. Machi clawed her nails further to his shoulder.

"One answer kid. And you get a free pass to all your limbs" She proceeded blankly. The force of her hand on his collarbone was impressive.

Killua nodded untroubled "start the inquisition, oh please, I'll be thrilled." he tilted his face. He was inviting them to begin the torture- Machi did have in her belt one of those contraptions that took your nails out, along with other things. His shirt was lifted by the neck and his back hit the tree behind him painfully. The rough bark scraped the skin, but that was the minor of his worries.

"Stop playing boy" She commanded, her stare plain cold calculation, as she licked the blood in her lower lip. The gun pressed to his knees slowly went upwards to his upper thigh.

His mouth felt dry.

Killua stared into fathomless eyes as he had done countless of time in his life. "Ask"

A voice behind reached their ears.

"Wait. He's a skilled liar. Let me try again"

Killua noted the hazel haired boy had recovered from the blow Killua had blasted on him. That made Shalnark really strong-no surprise there either, but still worth the moment of impression. He should have been left knocked out for three days if not left for dead -hadn't Machi stopped him on time. But again… these were spiders...while him and Gon... they were crazy.

Without looking behind to his companion, Machi kept silent, her lips a rigid line, her clasp firm on Killua.
"Come on, Machi, it'll be easier if my way works"

She did not rise her eyes from the albino but her silent acquiesced. She cursed silently.

"I'll have my go again" she whispered. The albino fell harshly to the ground to one side. "Yours"

This wasn't good. Killua disliked the hazel hair boy's aura with might-much more than the physical torture the woman could inflict on him. Thrown sideways he raised his eyes, blinking dirt to his white eyelashes. 

*Manipulation type.* Killua felt the sour distaste in his mouth. Shalnark was standing in front of him, eyeing him, taking him whole with apparent genteel eyes.

Ok. He assessed the situation. He was still bound in Nen threads, as strong as the strongest iron, strategically twisted around his body so that he could not exert the appropriate torque. Machi wasn't handling these threads. Else he'd had electrocuted her already…

Shalnark squat in front of him, a prodding look of curiosity. One of his delicate hands- the one not holding his bat cell phone- rose to his head. Killua repressed the shudder. He amazed at his own reaction- he found himself about to throw up. *The feeling of control, of utmost control, through his spine, his body-no-* He shook his head wildly.

The hand retreated. Only to hover above his forehead for a burning instant before he pulled away.

"It won't budge. I can't control him." Shalnark shrugged. His brow was furrowed in wonder "why is that?" he seemed to be asking him directly. Killua hid his own surprise blinking the dust away.

"If I knew, would I tell you?" he spoke with patience.

"You would not" Shalnark concluded. He raised his gaze to his companion. "Machi, I want to take him with me to play. He's interesting" he turned to look at Killua for the reaction.

The boy's eyes were almost unreadable. But just a flash informed him of high defenses. The flash of dislike-fear- hah- a flash of white teeth grinning and Killua knew everything Shalnark had taken from that one stare.

"You sound like Nobunaga right now" Machi murmured cleaning the barrel of the gun.

Shalnark continued to examine Killua with apparent friendly eyes. Calmly he sat in front of him, as if initiating a casual conversation.

"You are a runaway Zoldick, isn't it?"

He did not answer. He just managed to push himself into a sitting position, through his binds. The albino boy raised his violet eyes. An ice dead stare.

"Don't be defensive. Let's talk. We are quite a rational group."

*That had murdered Kurapica's clan, Kurapica's family, his friends.* And countless others. As once he himself had done. He remembered the cave with those ancient drawings, Kurapica's darkening eyes.

But...he couldn't help... feeling...every word Shalnark spoke was charged of something else, somewhat hypnotizing, soft as sin and inviting. And yet the base chord inside his head was repulsion as his poisoned words continued
"You just have to answer our questions. Your friend won't even know you were our source of information. You have the skills to lie to them easily..."

He did

"If you do not answer, I won't protect you for what Machi wants to do to you." Shalnark shrugged, with a friendly stare. Standing aside, the woman did not even give an acknowledging glance. Shalnark proceeded "If you don't speak…. and if you live her torture games… and even then you refuse to speak, I'll bring you into the group." Hazel eyes darkened a little "I'll guess then I'll force you to stay. And I will force you to stay until you like it" the spider commented in a tone that made you think he was just commenting the weather. He felt the bitter distaste at his throat and further down, he felt the lack of breath burning his lungs. The use of words. "Anyways, you must admit, it won't be as different as your previous life style, won't it?" he stared into Killua's eyes. "Why not join us" his voice enticing, supple as silk.

And yet the look of disgust must have displayed into his averting stare. He did not see Shalnark's brow furrow at his reaction.

Killua had lowered his gaze- try to regain your ground. Feel the grove below his feet, the part of his brain that analyzed danger situations rationally as taught activated always. This guy was of the manipulative type. That was what he was trying to do. As blowing his leg had seemed useless, he'd tried to threaten him with something that would truly inspire him fear: being imprisoned. He sweetened each word with poison ivy, surely Nen ability. The worse for him was the threat though.

So they truly needed the piece of information. They would try to get it at all costs.

\textit{He remembered how he'd stood, fisting his hands, in front of Nobunaga. They'd been imprisoned. His death and Gon's freedom had seemed better than both of their lives enslaved in betrayal to a friend... that, that- he would never. He'd thrown himself forward. And that'd been one of the most painful beatings Gon had given him. Cause there'd been other way...}

Well Gon had come out with the answer then.

"Don't put effort on useless tactics. We're not even that desperate for your answer as you might think, so just give in already. You should know by now that if you don't do our biding, your friend will."

He spoke smoothly as a finger caressing velvet " You'll just be the corroboration to the information we need. We're betting actually on him more than you. You must be further trained with torture sessions than he is..." He kept his friendly clear eyes as he spoke, musing.

Killua couldn't care less about that voice. His breath had stopped two seconds before. He'd bit his lip to refrain himself from speaking.

\textit{Gon}

He'd jumped forward in attacking stance, one of his arms freed on adrenaline strength. Destined to kill. He faltered as Machi behind gave him a swift fist in his back and shoulder. His arm went limp. Dislocated- beside the dripping blood of the wire that had managed to slice past his arms in his attempt

He cringed as Machi lifted him by the neck of his shirt. He was hit him against the tree trunk with force, the wire-like threads were suddenly fastened the more, until it cut his skin deeply.

"Don't get ideas." she spat "You're not able to escape. You're just wasting our time trying to run" A swift kick with her knee to his gut and he was left breathless.
He got ahold of his ground.

But Machi's eyes gleamed. And she knelt nimbly before him. For the first time he paralyzed.

Only two extended seconds later he realized he got the idea completely wrong and gave himself an internal smack when he saw the flash of her needle. He felt a deep sting at the base of his ankle. Before he could see more of it, both his legs bending awkwardly inwards… He fell with a loud thud to one side. He stared, his cheek again upon the forest ground, only able to catch a blur and then to feel morbid horror. His legs were sown together. She had stopped to marvel at her work. She now hovered over him, and held his arms up with ease through his binds. The needle pierced his skin, her hand moved at inhumane speed and his forearms were forced together, tattooed with perfectly lined stitches in an instant. He felt the sudden sting and the blood trickling,. Arms stitched. Legs stitched. Fallen against the forest floor.

"He was interesting" Shalnark shrugged as he turned aside to leave Machi space. "What a pity. But he's yours" he'd stated the obvious and Killua had run out of time. He only had his tongue Kurapica...

"I need this answer Killua" Machi said blankly. She used his name "This is the last chance, understand that kid. Understand I will blow your arm" she spoke unphased, over him, straddling him, the barrel painfully dug into the skin in his left shoulder.

Her fiery eyes burnt in her blank face "what is the Nen conditioning the bastard is using against our boss? Answer" she asked impassive.

Killua felt the vulnerability of his position. But he looked above, daringly. "I don't know" his voice surprisingly steady.

"Lie" Shalnark spoke behind.

"answer" she took his chin, her ruthless eyes studying his own.

He held her gaze undeterred.

"Ok then. No" his mouth formed a perfect "o"

Her eyes darkened… "Very well"

The barrel clicked

....

The banging sound echoed, and resonated deep within his skull. Squirrels jumped up the trees as Shalnark's eyes widened.

A spray of blood had smudged Machi's cheek.

Killua's eyes hadn't even closed or blinked. He could only guess Shalnark hadn't expected her to do it.

The albino had read her intent and pulled himself of her grasp with utmost force at the trigger. As he'd done so, the bullet intended to shatter his bone had deviated to dig into the layer of skin in the slope of his shoulder. The hole left only bled badly and stung horribly but wouldn't be troubling him for a while...
But this was bad.

This was awful bad.

Machi got off him disgusted, and he was lifted onto the tree again and kicked in his gut. He fell again. Machi observed him. She steadily aimed her gun to his bent knees.

"You won't be able to move this time" her eyes icy fire, revenge in one drink. "Answer" she spoke clearly "What did he do to Danchou? What are the rules binding him, speak now boy"

"Do you know the chain bastard's Hatsu?" Killua asked in a whim. Gaining time. Anything.

"We think that he might be either-"

"He's diverting Shalnark." She observed, her eyes never leaving him.

"Wait. Maybe his Hatsu has to do with his Nen conditioning. What Hatsu is he?"

Killua sighed "I would tell you. But how would you know if I'm lying" his voice was getting thicker as his neck began pulsing and he sensed the loss of blood drenching his shirt.

"He's diverting Shalnark." Her eyes scorched fire.

But Shalnark only stared at the oozing blood against the pale skin "We'll know if it doesn't match your friend's version." He extended his arms satisfied "that's the great thing of having two of you. If your answers don't match, we'll punish you both. So, what's his Hatsu again?" he asked casually.

Machi approached... The albino opened his mouth, and closed it, clenching his teeth. He thanked Pakunoda wasn't there because...

"He is not even your friend." Shalnark paused. "You'll lose a leg for what? Only a little damage to the chain bastard's side, boy. That piece of information doesn't even compromise that kuruta's life. You're willing to take that bullet?"

Killua did not meet the treacherous eyes. He stared at Machi's collarbone just in his line of view. He stared fixedly.

"Be rational and answer " Machi commanded. There wasn't a turning back, he knew.

...I'm sorry guys.

He inhaled.

"I am willing to take the bull-"

"NO!" he was hit against the tree "That's useless" Machi spat as she grabbed his neck. "What are the Nen conditions. Use that mouth of yours and tell us what they did to Danchou" Machi pressed the gun to his knee, biting her bleeding lip.

"Machi-"

"I can't" Killua raised his eyes to Shalnark in defiance.

"You can't because he Nen conditioned you too?" Machi asked, her eyes daggers.

He confirmed with his head.
"He's lying" Shalnark came closer. Machi's eyes were burning with venom. He felt the gun against his knee

"This bullet boy, will leave you with one leg less. You won't be able to continue as a hunter. You are signing your future" She said emotionless. She couldn't care less about his future despite every word she spoke had been true. He swallowed hard.

"Last chance boy. Answer." She whispered. Killua rotated his shoulder-blade and a click was heard. At least his dislocated arm was back in place. But his forearms were stitched together unable to move. He hadn't ability of motion, as well, with his knees bent as they were. One hand held him, the other aiming the gun at close range.

Killua's eyes met Machi's killer ones.

"Answer boy. Be wise. Think what you are doing and why" She spat. "What are the Nen conditions the bastard inflicted on Danchou"

He did not blink as his heart raced.

"Ignorance… is you knew best friend"

He felt her take distance. Shalnark argued something but his voice seemed faraway to Killua. He felt the click of her gun.

The sound sent the birds flying. A dull splitting sting reached from his knee to his eyes.

The airship was floating high over the forest, in a secluded area behind the mountain line. Leorio was climbing the hanging ladder carrying Gon up. More of struggling than doing any advances. The blimp had arrived in urgency after their call.

" LEORIO LEAVE ME"

The boy wailed and thrashed his arms, truly screaming as if a wild thing.

"LET ME GO! LET ME GO!"

"Gon stop, we'll both fall!" the rushing wind took his words though.

The black-haired boy suddenly unleashed himself, the doctor's tight grip suddenly failing and Gon dropped five meters downs. He fell to the ground on all fours and immediately began a run. Leorio raised his eyes to the skies, seeking somewhere patience,as he jumped the dreaded height and fell over the runner, straddling the younger one. He was, after all, a licensed hunter. He wasn't even sure he hadn't hurt the boy as he held him again forcefully. Gon tried to escape from his arms.

But this time, Leorio delivered one well given hit behind Gon's neck. He'd learned that from Killua one night they'd been gambling on the ship before everything went wrong. At the moment it'd seemed like magic, Killua making the people at the casino suddenly sleep. But sincerely it was the first time he tried it. Gon's body went limp which meant success,and he secretly hoped he hadn't done too much damage.

The doctor took the smaller boy's weight over his shoulder and reached again for the hanging ladder. Climbing for two wasn't easy, let alone with an unstable gravity. Furthermore, when they were reaching the entrance to the blimp, Gon began to recover his bearings. Leorio pushed the dark-haired boy inside in earnest, and jumped behind. Gon opened his eyes, reckoning the insides of the
"No…"

Jus then, to Leorio's dismay, the distinct sound of a gun firing was heard outside in the forests.

Without a second hesitation Gon launched forward. Leorio restrained him by the shoulders. It was quite similar to holding back a bull in force quantities.

"YOU DON'T UNDERSTAND" Gon yelled his eyes shut.

"Calm down"

"WE ARE NOT LEAVING WITHOUT HIM NO NO NO NO NO" he was punching the doctor fiercely

"Gon, we're not. We're not leaving without Kurapica or Killua. We would never."

Suddenly the boy sobbed.

"Please" he raised his head. His eyes brimming in tears "please… let me… go… let… me… go…"

Gon closed his eyes... He didn't want the doctor to see him cry. He cleaned the wetness with his arm roughly " It's my fault Leorio- I always create trouble- it's the hostage exchange!- either Kurapica gets in danger or –or-or-and Killua he's he- he's outnumbered.—they're spiders they'll do anything to him they'll"

And there it was, he couldn't speak.

Another bang was heard.

Gon, suddenly clear of mind dashed forward past Leorio. The doctor barely grabbed the boy's leg and threw him against a wall. He closed the door down sternly. As Gon dashed again, he tackled him.

"GON HEAR OUT"

Gon fought him frantically.

"GON!"

A slap was heard.

The boy went limp. Finally.

"Gon, Kurapica is fine, and Killua IS alright as well! It's Killua,none other! He IS coming. If not, I'm breaking my own glasses again and poking my eyes out ok? Be-lieve-me" he stressed desperately. "Above all I'm not letting you out! It won't be of any help! THINK "

"BUT-BUT"

"Gon PLEASE"

Gon closed his eyes tight shut…

He inhaled, taking control of his own emotions. He managed tonod.
"I promise you" Leorio let out tired.

"You don't have to get so gory though..." Gon commented, his eyes lowered. Leorio sighed. But Gon's eyes searched his gaze. Feebly – almost frail - he repeated again... as if he couldn't help himself... "Leorio... Please... please let me go... p-please "

Leorio almost hug him. So instead he took the boy by the shoulders and sat him "Gon... I can't... but we are bringing them back ok? Just wait patiently" The doctor's heart was at his mouth. Kurapica and Killua were both out there... and the doctor suddenly realized he just couldn't take the loss of any of the two. He wasn't ready. He would never be. And what he guaranteed to the boy in front he did not know himself.

Gon slacked. He went to the windows, wide-eyed. Searching. They'd been a thousand times in danger before. But Killua had never been on Gon's fault... or had he? He'd sustained damage on the volleyball match. But he'd never left him on the enemy's side outnumbered and in danger except only once, and he'd gone and retrieved him. Furthermore... he'd seen their menace. He knew they would do anything to him. Because they'd just tried so with him as well, as he was ambushed. Kurapica had helped him escape first. But... but... Killua?

He wondered if the fortune tell ladies could tell now if he was fine. He wondered if there was such thing as luck. Or choices.

**Where are you...?**

He ran and ran and ran, dashing through the trees up the steeping land, disguised by the forestry. His dousing chain gripped, his jaw clenched. He suddenly cursed, his eyes shimmering red. He hadn't even had the chance to meet the one he was supposed to, not given all this, agh thanks to them- the lovely pair, to them- because it was better to dwell in the anger than in the fear, they still had one of them and the thought- the unbearable thought that he would never, he'd vowed to never even let that same fear be on their hands NO, and strip him of what he had because because they had his... **friend**

And so he hated friendship as he ran and ran and cursed.

...

**He'd run home, to get there soon and be obedient.**

**All were waiting for him. His mother showered him with kisses. But he imagined her eyes disappointed. They all knew his assignment had gone wrong anyways. The problem had been that two separate entities were hired to kill one man. Killua had not been taught to deal with that kind of situations yet-father had said. But it seemed he was disappointed too. Or so Killua thought. He was barely being let out on field alone...**

-or not.... Illumi had seemed to appear just in time... he was probably observing him to begin with.

**Silva observed his silver haired son. He seemed unscathed. Of course he hadn't been told some fact. Facts like that from all the sibling to have been given assignments in field he was the one to achieve this the youngest. Or that he was considered to be the future heir... That was information not for him to possess... not yet...Now he was only to be trained. And trained.**

**Silva proceeded to explain out loud the photos were necessary to prove they- and not other person-**
had killed the target-and therefore they were entitled to raise the money.

Money... money... money...

He thought about the girl. Her broken figure bleeding the mattress, her eyes open. But they'd taught him not to linger on anything that had to do with training afterwards. It was barred. So he let the thought wander away like a haunting echo. They lined, all his siblings and him and mother and father and grandfather when Illumi arrived to the reunion room. Nanny and her younger siblings other caretakers were at a corner, expected to be there, present but invisible, along with the butlers that served them fresh tea, biscuits, apricot and plum cakes and delicacies.

Illumi stepped down the cold stone stairs.

Father saluted him "You've done your job well Illumi"

Mother smiled dearly to her elder son, who returned an empty stare as he halted in front of them.

Mother leaned towards Killua and gave him a little tug forward "go salute your brother and bid your thanks for protecting and teaching you".

Killua assented obedient.

At times the small albino resented his brother. Specially when training. You see, at times he could almost convince himself the elder seemed to take relish in his pain.

But...now... he thought this had just been his own mistaken idea. At times Killua distinctly knew he meant nothing to the elder...so sometimes he liked when he received attention from his brother-more than just the cryptic eyes. He felt acknowledged. But this was different. Today he'd been baffled. Beyond baffled.

His brother had saved him... He cared for him.

He stumbled and approached Illumi. The elder observed him, with those onyx dark eyes. At his proximity Illumi leant to his height.

"Killua. You obeyed, I found you here."His approval was empty. Not like when they were training alone.

"We'll discuss later the mistakes done. You are for now free to go " He monotoned. As if reading a script. This was Illumi the Zoldick. In front of the family, this Illumi always appeared-obedient, efficient. Empty.

Sometimes when alone he got to see an Illumi that was not as empty. But it scared him...

Now he thought he was wrong. He stood in front of his brother. You see, saving someone elses life, even kin, this wasn't in the code. You protected your own life, at all costs above anyone else's. You did not spend precious seconds on another. Never.

That was the teaching of utmost importance he'd learned. But now...

"Thank you Aniki" The small albino bowed his head to his knelt brother. And then Killua straightened and leaned forward. And he kissed Illumi's mouth. He opened his own lips to unclose the cold ones as taught. He leaned his head, bent forward as he would like.
A vase or something crystal-like broke in the background as if someone had let it fall surprised.

Killua separated himself scared. In front of him Illumi rose to all his height. On his lower lip still shone some of Killua's saliva. His eyes were observant. On Killua. He suddenly felt he was about to be devoured. It was just an instant as a shriek and a claw grabbed him from his shirt behind.

His Mother slapped him. He felt stunned. The yelling reached him from the ringing in his ears, him still half dangling from her claws- it was beyond yelling she spat alarmed that was wrong, inappropriate, children do not kiss on the mouth, brothers do not kiss brothers, was he stupid not to know yet, blessings it hadn't happened in front of visitors, how could he-It seemed it had been inappropriate on so many clauses because her voice rose and rose in pitch.

Behind his father calmly approached and took Kikyou's shoulder. "leave him dear. You are being harsh on him." He observed Killua with curiosity. "We do not know what he's picked up outside. But after all he is just a child"

Kikyou fumed but freed him "what a shame"

And he felt shame.

And yet Father words had been harsher than any of Mother's screams. He suddenly realized everyone was staring at him on the room. He suddenly expected Illumi to intercede-to explain.

He almost turned to face Illumi for help but he didn't. His guts told him Illumi wouldn't do anything. He would never. He realized Milluki was laughing and he was blushing furiously and so he ran. No one stopped him as he ran and ran ashamed, past the reunion rooms, through the labyrinths to his chamber. He closed the door with bolt and ran as a lightning under his bed.

He was biting back the sting to his eyes. Why? Why? Why had Illumi saved his life but hadn't defended him? what had he done wrong?

He instantly knew it was because he had gotten all, all messed up as always. He probably didn't understand some rule everyone obviously knew- he was always falling behind with understanding everything- He'd been the one to lean and kiss, he'd been the one to hesitate in front of that girl, his fault he clenched his eyes- he still was wrong because he still wanted her alive and he'd kissed Illumi. He began to kick each of his robots away with violence.

Now he could never leave from under there. Milluki would mock him for that kiss and at the thought he felt sick. He would never be able to face someone again. With no other choice he decided to camp down there for life. The first fifteen minutes he'd tore the limbs from all the robots he'd first kicked. Then he decided to attack the comics he had piled underneath.

He kept in the process of biting and shredding paper for quite a while... before one of the comics distracted him. As the clock turned he found himself settled and reading. He read and then slept and then woke up and read for what seemed like hours.

He realized he was starving when he heard someone unfastening the lock from outside. How? Only he knew that trick. He felt dread like a black pit in his stomach. He went to the farther corner of his underbed.

But it was soft steps that entered the room closing the door behind. She was humming as she sat on a chair near the bed. Outloud she sighed "How sad...it seems I'm alone as always... I'll guess I'll have to eat these on my own... and try to imagine myself some company..."

Nanny's voice was always soft. Suddenly he realized Nanny had left a dish in the floor just at her
feet.

It was filled with pastries..

He knew she was playing.

He didn't know how to react... he didn't feel like playing. He felt like a wrinkled drenched paper inside. But he was really hungry. He didn't want to play with her, but maybe she wouldn't notice.

A small hand came out from under bed and stole a brown cookie.

"ooh there seems to be a little mouse down there... But then, maybe I'm imagining things-you know-age"

He giggled against his will. He knew she was young

"im a cat" He whispered with his mouth full.

"a hungry cat?"

He nodded and realized she couldn't see him.

"yes" he spoke. "but im not coming out"

"its ok though. I'm accompanied now by a cat. That feels nice"

There was a silence. He stole another pastry.

"Nanny..."he slipped further into his corner though as he spoke. Away. She seemed to distinguish this because of the distance his small voice came then "I-I'm sorry...I'm sorry I am-"

Nanny left her chair and knelt in the ground. She would not look under the bed- she knew that way he would feel safer. She spoke clearly

"Master Killua...would you believe me if I told you something?"

he nodded. And then whispered "yes..."

"but would you believe me even though it didn't make sense to you?"

"...yes"he didn't hesitate this time. Nanny didn't lie. She just didn't.

"very well. Then you have to believe all I say. Not parts or bits but all." She spoke almost sternly and he was afraid again. He nodded silently.

Nanny sighed. "You said to me before "I'm sorry" she spoke clearly.

He nodded, unable to find his voice.

"You were yelled at, and you were slapped. BUT, and this is the part you have to believe me... it was not your fault."

He processed this and realized he did not understand. That was it, he never understood anything. He buried his head in his knees miserably. Well...at least he felt he could talk to nanny... "It was my fault. I did... something wrong" he almost whispered. Maybe Nanny hadn't seen...Would he be forced to explain what he had done?
"Nanny I..." but he didn't want to speak.

There was a silence that the boy almost took for acquiescing. But Nanny again spoke firmly.

"At the moment you kissed your brother master Killua, you answer me this truthfully, you knew you were doing something wrong?"

She took his words, but suddenly he found himself shaking frantically his head. "no!" He looked up desperate to nowhere, still huddling in the corner "no!"

"Then how is this your fault? If you had known you wouldn't have done it"

"But...I should have known then."

"No..." she trailed now "I...know it hurts... but you are a child my Killu as your father said. The bravest child I have ever met and actually the one your father is most proud of. As a child, the one at fault is the one who teaches you how to salute or not. Maybe it was even my fault" she giggled. Not letting her suspicion reach her voice.

The one that teaches you... but then.. But his thoughts were interrupted

"but even so, the way one salutes is not grave or terrible. You just learn from your mistake and that is all. No further damage is done. No screaming or slapping necessary"

Killua shook his head.

"I can't see them again..."

Nanny laughed "but why my child? It is not your fault! You said you were going to believe me!"

Killua nodded shyly... but kept silent

Nanny sighed "Then let me add this. Furthermore, even though they reacted that way I can swear to you that EVERYONE in the room knew it was not your fault"

"Really?" he blurted his eyes widening.

"really" Her words, firm as an oak.

"But mommy"

"she knew this too. And that is why she panicked."

There was a silence as he considered all this. His pale hand stole another biscuit. And disappeared again.

"Nanny...why ..." he was about to ask something. But he felt shame and changed the question...

"why do people kiss?"

On her side of the bed, Elaine had been expecting this.

"people kiss because a kiss means they care for another. But there are different types of kisses as there are different types of cares. A kiss to your forehead and to your cheek, as the ones I give you are the ones given from a mother to a son, from a brother to brother, for someone you care and love that you feel like family"
She avoided the fact of how this could change from culture to culture, not wanting to mess up with the boy's head.

The boy nodded silently, feeling a thick knot at what that meant coming from her...

"On the other hand, a kiss in the mouth means love in another way. It means love between two people that...let's put it this way, that want to marry. It usually happens with adults that are not related, but that want to make a life together as partners. That is why it never happens in small children...small children don't think of having partners. Unless they are the same age give or take, and are playing pretend or copying adults. That is why a kiss in the mouth is left for when you are older. It is something very precious and important to share with someone. Even as an adult you shouldn't go kissing in the mouth whoever crosses your way but someone you really love"

He felt even more confused.

"like you and your butler, I had seen it" He whispered...Killua imagined her blushing as she laughed. Her laughter was like singing bells.

"yes... like that"

"but... nanny... can it be that the world doesn't work that way always?"

She kept silent. Her voice came out hesitatingly "how"

It was his turn to hesitate...he tried to word his thoughts.

"Today in my assignment" she sensed nanny go still... but he proceeded "I saw a man of age. I didn't like him. I hated him because he was my target. That is no good, I shouldn't hate or...they taught me and...but...And this man kissed a girl who was there. I think she was twelve. He kissed her like Gotoh kisses you"

Nanny remained silent. Killua immediately realized he'd spoken his name and therefore had made another mistake. Anyone could overhear. He bit his inside cheek, he was prone to mistakes wasn't he? But Nanny did not seem to linger on that.

"Killu... How did you feel when you saw that?" she asked softly.

Killua tried to remember... and he spoke sincerely "it...felt wrong..." and he hesitated immediately "but maybe it was my idea"

"It was not. It is wrong. It is so in a way I can't explain to you now...but you trust that, trust that feeling. It is wrong."

Suddenly images went through his head that made him uneasy. He thought...when him... when he...closed the door and kissed him, it felt wrong as well...He remembered well, it had felt gross the first time he'd done that and other things. But then it also felt gross to eat poison, to sustain horrible insect bites, or... other things that Illumi also made him do that he disliked... That was because that was training.

Suddenly it dawned to him.

He processed slowly his realization. They had taught him that in real life you don't kill people just because. For example he couldn't kill his brothers or the butlers-not unless commanded. Only when training or working he became assassin. In real life you didn't drink bleach or poisons you found in the kitchens or the bathrooms. You only did in measured doses when training. In real life you didn't
They had always taught him it was two separate realms-training and real life. Illumi always stressed that.

That was why. That was why he hadn't defended him, and why he'd been wrong and mother had shrieked, he suddenly convinced himself. He'd gotten confused that was it. He felt relief, at suddenly being able to understand. He'd kissed him not in the proper realm of reality. That was it.

"thank you little nanny" he felt shy. He took out his hand to take out another pastry but it was caught. Nanny cupped his small hand between hers. Warming it.

"You are cold Killu. Come out and I'll wrap you on something warm."

He slowly did. He still could not face her well but she took him to her bosom and held him..."here... stay warm."

He hid under her caramel hair.

"You'll be fine..." She seemed to try to blanket him with the wish, as if trying to turn it into a presage.

He would be better next time. For nanny and for his family, he wouldn't let anyone down.

...Well, those where his innocent thoughts back then.

...

The reception of the small crew, wolves and prey in their little forest scene was that of skeptic wide eyes at his newly recognized presence.

He just directed a bored look at the silver hare- that is, the bound bloody boy. He seemed quite a mess. Deadly stunned, violet eyes looking at his knee. Amazing violet irises.

Hisoka smacked his lips.

"It's you small Zoldick. Well, I thought I'd chased the correct one but it seems I was mistaken" The clown spoke from a tree just beside Machi.

Three crimson lines trickled their way down the pale leg.

Not from a bullet. A deck card was dug deep into his knee cap as if a steel plate. It'd struck just in time to make the bullet rebound. The ricochet had barely missed Machi- on what would have been a deadly strike. It was presently stuck inside the green veins of an old tree, in a similar fashion as the thin steely two of hearts interred in his knee to his nerve, spattered with two matching oozing droplets.

Machi had snapped immediately at the rebound only to direct her gun at the attacker.

"Hisoka" She spoke calmly. "the bullet almost got me, is that what you wanted" She did not lower her gun, nor her eyes settled the threat.

"You threw it yourself" he smiled amused, his head tilted.
Her eyes flared, the only thing alive in her impassive dead stance "What do you think you are you doing" she demanded in operative detached killer monotone they all knew. Shalnark added amiably "weren't we to reunite later?"

Hisoka however, still amused himself in directing his speech to the younger one "It is not my fault… You two have such a similar scent from afar!" he trailed approaching "as if you slept together" he'd lowered the last to a suggestive eyebrow raise. Machi gave a tone to her eyes that on a more expressive person would have been a roll-eye gesture. Killua had just tuned it out altogether. He looked at the jester warily. His appearance had saved him. His leg- the bones- the femur, the tibia, his knee. Couldn't speak of ligaments though.

But the jester's alliances where assuredly uncertain.

The question itching up his throat, at his sudden appearance, was asked before he had the chance to verbalize it...

"What do you want with the other boy? Because we have him as well"

His guts dropped dead weight. It was a confirmation. One thing was manipulation mind board games where lies were spoken as a coin of currency, Shalnark’s white teeth and friendly eyes. The actual truth struck hard his gut. It automatically tensed his limbs as if to initiate a chase. He suddenly comprehended he was straining the stitches up his arms and down his legs.

He realized the jester had licked his lips at his closed reaction. But he just could not process any more words right now. Gon was in danger "She's done her own revenge on you hasn't she" He took in Killua's figure from head to toe "well then I shouldn't interrupt this lovely feast… should I?" Hisoka wondered

"Hisoka, why are you chasing him" the albino's voice came out thick.

Hisoka seemed about to applaud at the sound of Killua's voice. "My my" He spared a glance at the youngster. "Because he's mine to play and therefore mine to guard" his eyes keen.

Killua wrinkled his nose. His head felt hot, his heart thumping. Hisoka directed his assertive eyes at Machi as his slender body gained proximity "I don't want Gon dead yet, Machi. I thought the group had got that clear in our little bargain. I don't want him hurt either. You know me and my exquisite tastes" he spoke lowly, his mocking eyebrow still raised.

Machi kept silent, her stare fixed like ice shards assessing Hisoka-There was about her almost brimming anger. She murmured so lowly Killua's ears nearly didn't catch the rancor charged words "enjoy it Hisoka, enjoy it while it lasts"

"What my dear, the boy?"

Hisoka spoke looking at their hare rather than his speaker. The boy felt a rush of blood to the head, suddenly the stitches on his legs straining more than ever.

"Not your toys. They won't last long anyway, either way we pull the coin" her low voice seethed, her gaze cold "No Hisoka, enjoy it, being there now, the untouchable position. The moment you slip and give us what we want…that moment I'll be waiting at your throat" her lip curved up with hungry eyes. The burning in her predacious pupil eliciting a silent menace. "Dare you ever touch him"

"Your Danchou?" Hisoka laughed. "Oh your Danchou, full of secret enticing promises…we'll see… but do not get jealous my dear. Our turn to fight will come. I'll look into your breath-taking eyes
when we do" He lowered his voice to lust. He ignited menacing fire unto her stare but before another remark, Hisoka spun as if to depart.

Calculatedly he stopped "I will suggest you Machi not to dispose of that one as you wish to do as well" He offered his tantalizing words as a complying advice.

Machi, who'd turned at his leave, did not face Hisoka. Her anger flickered in her line of vision, straight ahead. Shalnark, who had remained quiet at the apparition, interjected "he's good trading material, we do not want him killed"

"Do tell that to your partner here. She would happily kill him, some taste on revenge uh? You're not even planning on returning him unless your Danchou is returned to his original state, isn't it?" Killua felt his heart stop.

"Oh, do tell me you're after this one as well" Machi jaw clenched

"Me? No..." Hisoka shrugged "He's not mine to share. That is my gentle warning. He's someone else's property"

Suddenly Killua felt his thoughts go blank. Hisoka spoke venom, venom, venom sipping down his words like sweet absinthe.

"The one who does own this little toy has the capability to kill all of you. I wouldn't be surprised he was near… I wouldn't be surprised he left you all for dead, was he left with damaged goods"

Near- he was near- near the words charred, screeching like a board chalk inside his mind.

"The boy anyway could escape you too right now. Why hasn't he? We can all guess. Maybe you are doing a favor to his owner… Maybe he is good trading material after all..." he said cryptically. And Hisoka let out an eerie laugh "But… maybe you can play with him…maybe the boy will like it, would you? and let him watch a bit..." he turned to stare at Killua, right into his eyes but his ears were roaring "I guess it will depend in the way you torture this one. Some things would definitely give him a kick wouldn't they-"

The next was all a blur.

He hadn't a chance to realize his own position... He was at Hisoka's neck. Strangling-silence him-silence him strangling, strangling, he felt each manic laughter rumble up the now bruised neck in the ring of his own pale hands. He realized he'd cut off his binds, his hands had stitched of apart on sheer volition and he was a bloody mess and he was on killing mode- and yet Hisoka sniggered through each punch he drew "It oh so wondrous!" the joker laughed almost manically as Killua punched and punched again, drawing blood, drawing more blood, his claw digging into flesh-Hisoka laughed now almost hysterically – from the corner of his eye he saw Machi give a step forward but Shalnark, a hand to her shoulder, halted her. He was observing… morbidly so, as Hisoka let himself be hurt and laughed "OoOoooh wonderful! Boy this rage! Pity you're out-of-bounds for me! Aaah all your anger, I could drink it all night! Why are you not mine to play, if I could..." Killua read the excitement in those pink eyes and a scalding white hatred flared to his fists his claws he punched his jaw and dug deep into his chest again and again and- "This amazing anger…this amazing strength..." the jester's words lowered drenched in lust- Blazing hot fire, springing his claw, carving out bits of flesh- Hisoka's eyes darkened, almost a glaze of sadness, with only one hand detaining his wrist

"And yet the means inflicted on you to create this..."
Punch-he'd freed himself and sliced meat.

"And I'm not even talking about the child tortures. Things I wouldn't even do myself" he murmured emptily.

"SILENCE" He punched his jaw. Hisoka just took a hand to his broken lip.

"I know he's been with you when no other word but sated is the word about him- with this eerie smile" he let each word out, dodging his blows, observant. Killua shook his head. "SHUT UP" he raged as he sliced again.

"to see exactly from where it springs" he continued a half lulled murmur, his eyes shining "to know what words will set you like wildfire"

"SHUT THE FUCK UP" he dug his claw again deep. But his wrist was gripped firmly and sickly pulled out.

"Are you selfish Killua Zoldick?!" And Killua hurt- his fears out loud and he lusted to kill and die but that last words he heard- "So you are going to kill me?"

He was

"You are eh? You are going to kill the only thing protecting Gon from falling into the spiders den ah? Well draw more blood then, after all, you brother's are not that different… your hands are indeed covered in blood" he laughed a smirk curving his lip

He would have frozen but he could not stop, and Hisoka laughed again, he found himself heaving punch- his words, blood-hate he could not stop, he'd said out loud all, amidst the jester's laughter-blood spattered-he was sobbing, his hands red.

Suddenly He felt a cold snake coil around his body. He froze,

Illumi. The fear left him paralyzed.

Hisoka muttered under his breath devious "you... are welcome youngster" he whispered to his ear; bleeding badly and yet not an ounce disturbed, just certain lack of breath to his voice. He licked blood of his, dripping down one of his wrists with an ominous smile while lifting a card.

But he couldn't see which one, Hisoka had vanished.

Or Killua did. He realized he'd been covered in chains and suddenly he was pulled through the forest from a long distance. Machi jumped forward but he'd flown away literally soaring through the dense trees backwards, not once hitting the thick trunks, bound in chains. He soared miles in an instant.

He fell on his knees. To Kurapica's shadow.

"Gotcha...." Kurapica sighed.

Chapter End Notes

A/N:. I'm back as promised. I took of with a slow start the last one, so here you have a chapter with lots of content. I tried to include things you would like. I thanked all of you
who reviewed really, it lits a spark on parts inside I thought dead. I love to know which scenes you like and don't. I have gone back to correct stuff you pointed. Thank you again my readers...

In some days I'll post another one. If not, do bug me. My internet's been failing on me though but i still try...
I... feel lonely... if you review... at least I'm not here, on a boat alone in the broad sea at this dark night of mine... I have always to remind myself...you are here too
He realized he'd been covered in chains and suddenly he was pulled through the forest from a long distance. Machi jumped forward but he'd flown away literally soaring through the dense trees backwards. He soared miles.

He fell on his knees. To Kurapica's shadow.

"Gotcha...." Kurapica sighed

He could barely look up to him. His mind was still on the battle. The blood. The words said. And he'd failed...

He was breathing hard.

A glacial voice reached him

"Killua. Stand up."

He observed quite stupefied the chains at his feet. He suddenly became aware of his own image... his claws were dripping blood and strings of torn flesh. 

He was in front of ...Kurapica.

He would not raise his eyes. He blocked the morbid thought that crossed his mind.

"Killua. Now" he commanded sternly "We need to run."

He shakily stood up. It was easier to pretend he was not here. To activate only his operative mind.

"Are you able to run" Kurapica asked "You're bloody. Are you wounded"

"Not"

His red eyes were staring ahead, not even glancing him, but probably calculating. For their lives. Or maybe just averting him. A stare avoidant of the striking killer image...

He saw Kurapica give him his back and begin to run as a sign of approval. He felt the tug of the chain that now shook around his ankle. He ran behind and panted. Jump. Duck. Through the dense forestry. They were now following a river- he panted and tried to analyse - it would take them to the coast to the camp-

All swirled off its hinges. He shook his head panting laboriously.
"Where are we going?" Killua let out faintly, noticing his own lack of breath. More so. He was gasping, heaving. He hadn't stopped heaving since the fight. Kurapica was adamantly disregarding his state, something which Killua thanked deeply. The blonde answered without halting.

"To the others, to Leorio, on the airship" a curt reply.

*But Gon...? Is Gon?* – He realized he couldn't verbalize the question. Scenes with Hisoka kept replaying to his eyes, jump -duck -left -right- his mind thumped hotly in words and blood-he'd... *Illumi was near he'd said – and is Gon...? where....is Gon...? Gon-*

He was abruptly on hands and knees. He'd lost concentration. Slight awareness of his knee stinging like he'd fallen on barbed wire. He raised himself but noticed again his sticky hands, he was covered in blood and dirt and more blood. *Gon.* Blood smeared across his palms, blood smeared across his cheek. Breathing became harder by the second. Images -Images- flashing-dashing-lashing-blood-his *black charcoal eyes*- It was happening again. No. no no no no- he gulped in air.

Kurapica almost shot him a glare. "Killua, stand up! They're following! I don't know if I will-" *be able to protect you* he was going to say, but the younger one stumbled.

"My hands... I can't... my hands... I need to wash my hands" Killua heard his thoughts aloud in an incoherent mumble and then bewildered at his own response. But the blood in flashes struck behind his lids whenever he blinked, Hisoka's laughter-

*No -no-NO.*

He put an effort in returning to himself, he tried to clean his hands on his knees and set himself to run, *be practical* but his knee cap bloodied them again, a stinging pain and he fell to his knees, the wound to his neck suddenly ablaze as he moved his arm to stand again "my hands..." as if he couldn't stop gasping the fact he struggled to clean them with his sweat and bloodied shirt, he tried his best to be aware, his lungs hurting.

"Killua, not now!" Kurapica said sharply pushing the boy to stand up.

The boy flinched away violently at his hand. Then he shook his head, and nodded robotically."*Right*" a dazed mumble, and as if wireless-commanded the albino automatically began to run. Never once facing his companion's eyes, he would never. Kurapica stared at his back trying to sort different commands in his mind. But no, they had to run, so he took that as a cue to run as well.

Soon Killua had fallen behind, something the boy wasn't used to. But again it was taking his all to concentrate - *jump- duck, tree, stone, mud- breathe*- He had to face Gon...*breathe...or maybe... Gon wasn't even... and it'd been his fault- concentrate, look ahead-the sight, the smell of blood, a scent he'd memorized, it permeated the air that he slew in their dash. The blood down his neck itched and mingled with the one that wasn't his and Gon would see his hands- *Illumi had seen the fight- Illumi had-* but what did that care if-if *Gon,* No, Gon wasn't hurt-* was he? Because he'd failed him*-Hisoka, his words thumping feverish to his forehead- *Gon was he?*

**PAIN**

He'd fallen flat on his stomach. And his shoulder had ceased to be. From too damn painful to coldly numb, that how it felt. He realized he was heaving, heaving and choking dirt out from his lips. His foot trapped by a root, what was he, a noob? He gasped his lips against the dirt, the mud against his cheeks. His arm was unresponsive.

He felt himself being turned.
"You are wounded" he heard Kurapica whisper from afar, he felt his shirt torn at his neck and the wound was pressed, and he saw stars and clenched his teeth as he'd always done with other gunshot wounds in life. And then he was raised. He could only shut his eyes as he cringed to the touch rather than the pain, but then the boy went limp. Kurapica cradled him in arms without a word trying not to waste one more second. The Kuruta went ahead, ahead, the small figure pressed against his chest, speeding up through the trees and he just hung- so dizzying- it all swirled, he felt about to throw up- his brother in every blurring shadow, every corner bolted, the scenery just sprang and dashed, darkness to its borders - his property-Never free-His to play...sated he'd said, sated was the word about him-sated – He nails sunk against his own palm, it was all over, all over again again again. But he deserved it. He was choking-he hadn't protected Gon-are you selfish Killua Zoldick- because… one day you'll kill him he's said at the exam one day you'll hurt him-

his lungs shut down.

God. His throat was strangled from within, air, choking badly and he abruptly fought himself away from the blonde, he wouldn't let him, he clawed his way out, the albino fell, stood, leant in a tree choking, choking bad- unbreathing- air air air-

Kurapica halted brusquely and lifted Killua by his shoulders, yelling 'breathe'. The pain stung from his neck to his brain and with a lash of his head he shut his eyes.

"Killua I don't have time for this! I..." he said... almost... guilty? Kurapica eyes widened at the wetness on the corner of the closed silver lashes.

Half of Killua's mind realized that his throat was tighter by the second, it was becoming worse and worse and worse and air air air- the other half of his mind was still in front of Hisoka tearing flesh, the words, he'd, he'd said aloud, he'd said aloud...

Aloud

And worst…he'd-

He'd almost killed Gon's chance to survive.

He closed his eyes, sucking in air-

"Killua Breathe" he heard Kurapica from afar.

"Gon…” he opened his eyes and tried to gasp words. He would never forgive himself if-

A dawning of understanding reached the kuruta's eyes. "Gon? Gon's fine. He's perfectly well, waiting for you" he tried.

Disbelief. Then relief at the fact. Then the relief refused to settle his erratic chest... Now he knew. Gon was well.

"Leave… m…me...h...here…” Killua panted gaining distance. He loathed and dreaded the lack of control over his body-he couldn't -he couldn't-air.

"What?!"

The boy supported his hand to his knees, gasped in air, stood straight again. Heaving, but in direct eye contact to the Kurapica for the first time. "Leave …m…me …here” he demanded. He closed his eyes- hate. He could not manage this. Air-
Kurapica stood lost for an instant. Then he dismissed this and determined to carry the boy again. He was shoved away aggressively.

"They...are closing in... Kurapica!" he gasped and gasped trying to sort the raid of images to his eyes. "Run... you...run" Killua clenched his jaw - Gon- he thought he imagined Illumi's presence- disgust- he felt paralysed and falling. He was there, observing, waiting his chance to steal him away- he frantically passed his palms over and over his shirt, unable to breathe.

Kurapica was struck in place.

"go... away" he sucked in air painfully. The blonde negated, operative yet stunned.

"Killua we need to leave, and now-I need you to be reasonable- please-" the voice tuned out

_He wouldn't let Illumi near Gon, never never-

"GO" he shut his eyes. "GO AWAY"- he yelled and his lungs collapsed.

SLAP.

Killua closed his eyes at his raised hand. He was still hitching, unbreathing, closing his eyes tight shut not to sob.

"I didn't mean! Argh! I- I don't know how to deal with this. I'm not Leorio! I'm..." He spoke frantic. "I'm taking you to Gon."

He grabbed him and was shoved away with strength. But with the impulse Killua fell to the ground in front of him. His claws on his head as if trying to tear his mind away his toy, his puppet, why run? Why run- Never Never...never... He'd, he'd proved no different from him, His teeth gritted - he was endangering Kurapica- RUN- he'd endangered Gon- Illumi near- just as Hisoka knew-he knew- he knew all...all-he sobbed-

_He knew...

Words were being spoken but they didn't reach.

Abruptly he was pulled up by chains, and found himself soaring.

SPLASH

A wakening electric shock. The icy water engulfed him.

He'd been thrown to the nearby river. Then the chains immediately weighed him down. He was going to drown... he sensed that. For some reason Kurapica had shoved him away. He did not fight this. His thoughts went blank.

_He ...welcomed it...

From underneath the running waters he saw Kurapica enter the river. Looking wary everywhere for enemies, his white Bermuda getting wet, to his waist. And then the blonde lifted him from the depths...

Killua breathed.

Kurapica held him, and hastily took one of the boy's blood smeared arms and washed it. Without saying a word, he took his other punctured arm to clean it with his own vest... the boy curled to the
touch, dazed, looking at Kurapica as if something unrecognisable.

He suddenly understood again the situation. The change in temperature had the desired effect. His erratic breath began to settle slowly

"I'm s...sorry" Killua murmured and breathed. "I... got...carried away."

"It seems"

Kurapica looked at him with strange eyes but Killua missed the meaning. The albino just suddenly regained control and pulled away gently, still stunned. He immediately washed his own face, his blood matted hair and his lungs still hurt but they were settled. He washed quickly his neck, his hands; He confronted Kurapica steadily and the blood under his nails would have to wait.

"Thanks to my delay, they're closing on us now, approximately 200 meters away"

"Those are my calculations..." Kurapica blinked

Killua was rapidly climbing out of the water... giving his back to Kurapica he murmured "I owe you... God, I'm loaned with everyone"

"Killua..." but he was interrupted as the boy turned to face him

"No time for that. We need to get out of here fast, faster than what we are able running. Kurapica do you trust me?" well, his leg was weak but he refused to lean against a tree.

There was a silence as Kurapica emerged from the water. He looked at Killua, taking his form still startled. His stained and drenched clothes, the bandage to his shoulder that had fallen and the wound at his neck that was grisly. But he seemed cleaner. And he stood tall as he was. "Do you?" he pressed.

"Of course I do" Kurapica almost didn't know what to do about what he'd just seen...

Killua tried not to linger on answers he did not believe. They had to be practical.

"Then do not laugh... and piggy back me"

"What? Are you able to? Your knee"

The boy seemed much paler than usual but Killua's eyes were resolution. Kurapica had seen that somewhere else...

"Do you trust me?" he repeated in what he felt was a formality.

Both knew they hadn't much time for questions. Kurapica nodded and awkwardly piggy backed him, being taller than the boy.

"This is hilarious" the albino commented, again his nonchalant tone, carrying him as if light weight "it won't be comfortable... particularly because I'm drenched in water but that was your doing" -And he seemed his usual self-but that was the last thing Kurapica could notepad to his mind before he felt the wind and horrifying pain on every patch of skin. In delay he realized they were almost soaring, running like the wind and that he was receiving subtle electroshocks

"What direction?" the boy shouted throughout the roaring speed.

"North!" Kurapica yelled half out of pain. The boy speeded up even more, to Kurapica's amazement,
...They arrived at the base of the airship.

Killua was the first to climb the dangling ladder, though with difficulty, drained and one-handed and with a well hidden desperation. Written in his eyes the need to confirm his best friend's safety. Before he continued his climb though he made sure to look at Kurapica once more in the eye.

"Kurapica, do not tell Gon. That's ability is my se-cret" he forced the smirk.

But then his curved lips tightened

"...Back there..." it was almost a whisper.

"It's ok, don't dwell on it"

Both were abandoned to a silence. Killua shook his head-

"Kurapica…we were fools"

"Climb. We'll talk"

Killua nodded. And went on.

Kurapica watched the silver hair in the wind, now drying…

...

As the blimp's emergency door opened, Gon almost jumped out of his skin. He stood up. As if from a well, a drenched Killua emerged climbing. The moment Gon's eyes spotted him, he leapt forwards. Killua caught sight of him, stumbled in and caught to him midway. They stood in front of each other wide-eyed.

"Gon"

"Killua"

Those honey eyes were relief itself as he hadn't seen on the whale island kid before.

Gon was box-ring kind of battered. He stood awkward and short of breath-he must have fractured ribs. Three on the left side, Killua diagnosed easily. His Jan ken pon arm seemed broken as well in two parts. And he was badly bruised, all over black and blue, his cheek swelling, another cut to his forehead. The wound under his ear had dried long ago, leaving but a thin dark line in his neck.

"You're…you're fine" Killua sighed relieved.

Those were their standards of fine

"Are you fine?" Gon choked. He could only look at the bullet hole blooming gruesomely out of the slope of the albino's shoulder, drenching down the torn wet t-shirt. But if he forced his sight
elsewhere—which proved difficult—well he found cuts everywhere.

It was not that he hadn't seen gunshots. But he hadn't seen one in Killua.

Killua looked aside—he hated it... but Gon had managed worst peeks at his bloodied killer side... He nodded half a smile. "I'm in one piece. For a minute there though, I was about to be returned in two separate packets. Nothing like when you blew your arms with bomber though."

"You're wet and bloody all over! Are you wounded? And you disappeared! And then others did appear and Kurapica didn't as we predicted, and then it all ran out of hand—"Gon blurted high on adrenaline just as Killua simultaneously began explaining how he'd run behind Machi, their hostage. Both felt silent at their interruptions. And then both giggled awkwardly and continued their chatter with voices that mingled the matter-of-fact-tone with the excitement. Yes. Both had been thrilled and scared the hell out.

Kurapica and Leorio had rolled the ladder together. Leorio observed Kurapica in silence, which ignored the silent question. The blonde was also half wet, but healthy. And deadly serious. Bits of conversation reached them. They closed the blimp's trap door. And Kurapica, with a decisive stride, walked to where the boys stood.

Both kids fell silent.

"You two. Sit."

"Kurapica..." Gon's eyes lowered trying to speak

"Sit"

Gon bit his lip but abided.

Waiting for the guys to come Gon hadn't truly seen the insides of the airship out of worry. He now appreciated they were floating in a place as comfy as the insides of the Totoro's cat bus. The walls were all lined with cushioned benches and polarized windows. This last did not matter that much, as they were soaring higher and higher into the lonely skies.

They sat side by side. Kurapica assessed them, his eyes critical and serious.

"Killua, I would change you into dry clothes, but the priority is to attend your wounds. Rest on your back" he said sternly and motioned towards him. Killua thought he'd rather avoid any touch and hurriedly plopped against the cushioned bench. This wasn't wise - the world fell off its hinges for some seconds. He had to reckon he felt faint headed. But Kurapica was being a bit melodramatic anyway.

"Leorio, check if the bullet is inside"

"It is not" Killua muttered but Kurapica cut in "check his wounds. They must be clean before I heal them"

Wouldn't they leave the nice carpeting all bloody? The albino idly wondered as he felt his own wet shirt dousing the cushions. Then Leorio placed a towel under his head.

Gon felt all his thoughts enter stop motion as Kurapica assessed him from head to toe. He did not have an excuse to any of this mess. But then a cross-tipped chain coiled around the broken arm. He felt surprise. They'd both been expecting the yell out first you know. He felt the foreign Nen wrapping his skin, its warmth spreading to the innermost layer of flesh.
The ignored ice-cutting strain of the broken bone was slowly, ever slowly melted to nothingness.

"Extend your arm and clench your fist" Kurapica instructed

Gon did. As good as new.

"Practical" the raven commented faintly. He remembered quite well the two months he'd had to wear a cast at the Ring Tower.

Kurapica's eyes were severe "where else are you hurt"

"His ribs" a monotone reached them. "Left side. Three" the horizontal albino murmured.

Kurapica's fist clenched, but his voice remained unchanged. "I'll leave that procedure for last because you should be standing"

"It's a clean path" Leorio at his side called out, trying to avoid Killua's dead stare fixed on the ceiling. 'The one he always wore when being checked.' He'd cleaned the wound as much as possible, and pressed towels to stop the bleeding.

"Are you hurt …elsewhere" Leorio didn’t dare voice any suggestions- lifting his shirt up was out of the question despite all the blood stains. Killua directed slowly his stare to observe the doctor like a panther. And then he let out a faint laugh.

"We could have used Kurapica's Nen powers the last time, eh?" he said with a phantom smile. "It would have been so much faster" the albino murmured looking at the ceiling again.

"You said I could not…"

"I'm not hurt Leorio" the pale boy interrupted "It's someone else's blood"

He bore a look that read- happy?

Gon turned his head swiftly "who? Ooooww…” his ribs were broken and hurting. Kurapica scolded him not to move, healing the large bruise on his face

"Did you-" Leorio was interrupted

"No. I did not kill anyone if that was your question" His voice hollow.

Gon rolled his eyes, "No, whose blood…” Gon trailed with effort to his breathing, his hand flying to his rib bones, yet interested. Killua opened his mouth... but an abashed Leorio dismissed the conversation "Killua, focus, and help me here. Afterwards we'll speak. Where else? Oh, your knee… Oh geez" He exhaled "How-"

Killua closed his eyes. "It was one of Hisoka's cards." He shrugged. Or he would have shrugged if he hadn't a gunshot where his collarbone met his neck. "They're like steel plaques. It's a clean cut" empty eyes stared up.

"Hisoka?" Gon was baffled. Kurapica for a second had also looked up.

"He appeared? But why? Killua did he hurt you?" the raven questioned. He had every right to that curiosity of course.

"I…” Killua tried to sit at this but the doctor held him down, still on his knee. He spoke clinically "Later. So it is a deep cut, and all mangled in dirt. You shouldn't be able to bend it. This will hurt" he
opened it with his doctor gadget thingies and it did. But Killua rather focused on how the pain waved, painting the pattern in his mind like notes in a piano score, a useless learned ability.

"In a way he could avoid some muscle and tendon damage with surgeon accuracy. But he still did damage, you carried him here Kurapica? Or did you limp?"

"No, he didn't let me. He actually ran." Kurapica emphasized. Leorio looked at him vexed "Well how brilliant Killua, that definitely made a fresh start for your about to cut tendons"

The entire time Gon was trying to catch Killua's stare unsuccessfully.

"...Killu, Hisoka was the one to do the red dots up your arms?" The anxiety breached the raven's tone. You could notice the tiniest beads of blood lining his forearms and legs.

"yeah-what with that?" Leorio added fumbling still annoyed.

"It wasn't Hisoka. Machi stitched me up" His mumble was lost as Kurapica exclaimed over him disturbed

"Gon you lost a tooth?!"

One of the boy's back molars was missing- the probable reason behind the tanned swelling cheek.

"I bet you can't heal that up!" Gon giggled. But suddenly the young raven halted his laughter and snapped his head towards Killua, receiving his words in delay. "Wait. Machi **stitched you up**?"

"What?" the doctor echoed. They hadn't heard at all the first time.

A dead silence settled.

It was a relief really; all this chatter did no comfort to his muddled mind. But his arm was taken swiftly and he warily opened his eyes. Leorio held it.

"WHAT IS WRONG WITH THEM" Gon turned brusquely, but his wrist was held by a severe Kurapica.

"He… stitched you? With her Nen thread?" Leorio asked weakly.

"...well...she's really creative." Killua replied blankly "and...She was really mad you know. But it sounds more twisted than what it actually felt"

Leorio had been checking on Kurapica's expressions all the while- the clenching jaw, the stiffening stance. Right now the blonde's brow was furrowed as he worked on Gon with angry movements.

"...Well, it could have been much worse." Kurapica chewed out. "After all you two were looking undoubtedly for dramatics- I guess we can agree you got what you were looking and what you deserved" His every word weighed down to the deepest low.

Leorio snapped "Kurapica, they were tortured, no one deserves-"

But he fell silent at his dark stare. His eyes weren't red... but still loaded in fury.

Gon snapped out of Kurapica's reach and confronted him directly "Go on. Spit it."

Kurapica stared at him with fathomless eyes.
"SPIT IT" Gon defied him "or else all this is just cynical!" He waved at their attempt of help, but Kurapica had already stood in confrontation.

"Very well Gon. You had no right to meddle in my affairs-you had no right" his jaw tightly set. But not adding further. There it was. The lecture the two had been waiting. It was so parsimonious it made Killua smile.

Gon immediately stood up and shook off Kurapica's chains.

"Do not fix me if you do not understand!"

"YOU'RE THE ONES THAT DON'T UNDERSTAND!" Kurapica suddenly roared withdrawing his chains "What were you thinking?!" he spoke almost out of breath.

That was the proper admonishment.

"AND I don't know why I ask really!" His words flew angry and fast. "Somehow you thought I would enjoy another hostage exchange? Ah? AH? Have you ever stopped to think the consequences involved in all you did?! My responsibility on getting you safe, you getting harmed, my plan being thwarted-"

"We didn't want a hostage exchange!" Gon cut in.

"But we'd anticipated that in case it happened" Killua commented... they'd been supposed to be together in that one though...

"We just wanted one spider as a hostage of our own, to help you!" Gon replied.

"WHAT?" Kurapica and Leorio let out together. Almost incredulous. Suddenly the naivety of the plan the boys had resolved hit them. Kurapica felt faint-hearted.

"You thought you'd" His hands fisted even more "you-you FOOLS!" he spat "YOU IDIOTS! I TOLD you, Gon, Killua, CLEARLY not to, NOT TO EVER step into my affairs! I SPECIFICALLY ordered you to stay away- away from them!"

"Away from the phantom brigade you mean" Gon spoke the taboo out of his lips with a growl

"YES!" He glared "and YET you went ahead and- LOOK AT YOU NOW! You're a MESS"

"But we almost did it. We almost caught a valuable hostage" Killua cut in again softly

"At what stake!" Kurapica snapped back at the pale boy. The albino had seldom seen Kurapica this altered. He nodded conciliatory "Point taken"

But Gon's shook his head, his brow creased "Well, Kurapica, understand this: WE would do it again!"

All the ones present stared at Gon. Even Killua.

"WHAT?" the blonde roared.

"What you heard!"

Kurapica's hand fisted, trying to repress himself, yet seething in rage.

"so I heard well? Tell you what Gon, go ahead" venom was seeping into his voice as they'd hadn't
heard before "try it, try your pathetic plan again. But do it conscious, oh yes conscious that it is out of your own pathetic need to prove yourself, out of your own fear to be weak!" he spat " AND NOT to help me"

"you don't mean that!" Leorio warned and Killua's eyes flashed, but Kurapica's bangs swayed as his snapped his head at the doctor.

"YOU are to tell me what I mean?! NO! AND I DO MEAN IT!" he'd turned to the Gon, whose eyes were on fire "YOU HAVEN'T HELPED ME IN ONE BIT! NO! BUT WANNA TRY? YOU'RE WELCOME TO CONFRONT THEM, MEASURE YOURSELF, SEE THE OUTCOME EH? LEAVE WHENEVER YOU WANT THE DOOR'S OPEN, JUST DON'T INVOLVE ME AS THE EXCUSE!"

"The door's too high though" Killua commented in a murmur no one heard. He knew exactly what Kurapica was doing. Making sure Gon never got near the spiders again, sealing this with words, his only weapons against Gon's intent... He was doing this at whatever the cost- whatever the damage-

"I DIDN'T DO IT, NO! I DIDN'T DO IT OUT OF, NO KURAPICA-" Gon had raged and tried to interrupt as Kurapica yelled but he cut himself at the last of his words "Wait, what does it mean that I can leave?!" Gon eyes widened "are you quit being my fr-

"NO!" Kurapica opened his arms. "Gon! Agh, you got the spider you wanted? No. You thought I'd be glad to take one? N-

"Oh shut up, admit that you would have liked to have a spider as a hostage…" Killua arched his silver eyebrow. His voice silken, certain smooth aggression hidden like a challenge. His sleek usual demeanor, unphased, only deadly pale for a difference as he rose to sit "Besides, me and Gon work really well as a team. Our plan wasn't that faulty- one day more and we would have refined it to perfection, but as you acted more quickly we had to improvise, we had supposed we would find you first and-

Then all swirled. He was obliged to pause, out of breath suddenly. He inhaled, to regain his strength as he felt light-headed-focus-but Kurapica took that chance to interrupt "YOU SAY YOUR PLAN WASN'T THAT FAULTY! You Killua, You-

"KURAPICA-tend to Killua's wounds first" Leorio directed a reprimand glare to the kuruta.

Kurapica closed his eyes, his brow knotted, trying to inhale patience. He had this out-of-body vision of all of them, teens and young adults, fighting as they were.

It ...seemed petty.

He felt upset. It wasn't petty though, NO. It just didn't feel so, not for him. For him this matter was…it was…

"Kurapica!" Leorio demanded. The blonde walked towards Killua in severe silence. The towel to his neck was crimson drenched. The boy, sitting adamantly in silence, was bent forwards, his hands firm on the bench edge to keep him steady. Killua knew neck wounds were bloody and he'd used his Nen to slow the bleeding until he'd gotten too tired to help it. Time had elapsed since he was shot, so it was becoming slightly dangerous. But the most that could happen was him fainting. Or losing his arm due to bad irrigation. It felt cold, dead and heavy, that arm of his. Somehow he did not care.

Kurapica observed the resolute violet eyes an instant. His chain materialized again. Killua had never seen Kurapica like this- maybe Leorio had- but he still raised weakly yet bravely his operating hand,
signaling him to stop.

"I don't want your help" The boy's mouth twisted a faint grin. "Not until you understand" he said softly- trying to forget the part about his vision falling into unfocused range

Leorio knew that one year or so before Kurapica at this defiance would have stormed out. He opened his mouth to protest but Killua silenced him.

"We were fools Kurapica. We were" he stated. Almost as an apology, his violet eyes seeking him.

"We were. Real fools" Gon echoed behind. "And it was all my idea, it is my fault-you have a right to be mad"

"But I wanted to help as well" Killua cut in "And I knew far more than Gon that this was crazy and stupid"

Gon suppressed the quick glare he would have given to the albino. But he played on.

"Well as crazy as our plan was" he conceded "... AND it WAS crazy! And we were wrong, real wrong, but even then, we did not want to leave you alone."

Killua ended it "Me and Gon...we do not want you to kill"

A mortal silence settled.

Kurapica looked at them blankly. The way they spoke, it made all worse, it ached deep, it echoed phantoms to his ears- NO, he shook them with a jolt of his head, his blond hair swaying

"NO. I won't take that!" He closed his eyes "You... you don't understand! You just DON'T! Now, Killua let me!" he would not feel guilt. He'd had too much of it in one life so it all switched to the anger seething through his veins. They would not understand it wasn't his choice, the life he led they did not! His life, it been theirs since the moment the brigade had gone to the kuruta tribe, they had tied them all, they had- his thoughts were cut by the albino's answer.

"Not until you understand" Killua calmly replied

His hands fist ed shaking

"STOP IT! YOU DON'T UNDERSTAND! YOU DON'T HAVE A CLUE! FOR ME... YOU DON'T! YOU THINK YOU'RE ON A PLAYGROUND WHEN YOU FIGHT BUT-

"WE DON'T" Gon angered. Kurapica shook his head and paced.

"After Yorkshin, I asked of you this, ONLY THIS! You know what? I don't want your hunter committee paid vacations-which you yourselves got thrown out! - I don't want your-your" he seethed "your childishness, your idiocy- I don't want the weight of your problems on me! But no, here I came, and in exchange I only asked you ONE THING! ONLY ONE! NOT TO MEDDL E IN MY AFFAIRS EVER AGAIN- This is MY BUSINESS! YOU DON'T HAVE ANY LINKS TO THEM, HOW MANY TIMES MUST I REPEAT MYSELF? IT IS MY PAST-MY PAST"

"KURAPICA" Leorio yelled taking a step forward, with all the seem ing of being about to punch. Gon immediately halted the doctor with an arm.

"Kurapica listen out" he spoke stern, his voice lowered. Almost the one of an adult. "I understand we're insufferable. Further than that, it's your family to avenge, that's what you feel. But now you
understand this" he said resolute "it's our friend's life at stake. We reckon it is your right to choose whether to kill or not and of course we'll let you free to choose this. But it is your life in danger, a life we treasure. That's the link you're missing. We will do our best to avoid you being threatened because you are our friend!" He inhaled quickly "Unless you don't count yourself as our friend, and if so, just say it now."

His eyes challenging. Two blazing flames.

There, Killua could see it even though the others didn't. A shade of fear to whatever truth he was about to receive.

Kurapica took one of his hands to his eyes violently "You are! You are my... "He wouldn't even speak the word "But..."

He sat exhausted on one bench... "But no. Not under these conditions." he was shaking his head "I can't have you tailing me. I won't explain myself to you guys and I can't have you meddling and making matters worse with a group so dangerous."

"Kurapica-"Leorio interjected but Killua spoke softly.

"No. It is true" he closed his eyes tired. "Our intention was to help but we did make matters worse" Killua spoke softly, sitting still on one corner, his back against the wall... almost collapsing on his own limbs.

Kurapica immediately stood up. "Killua, let me heal you first, we resolve this later" he commanded trying to control his anger.

"There's nothing to resolve" Killua spoke smoothly. "We won't tail you if you are sincere."

"You're going to continue this charade?! you don't understand! You'll never!-" The blonde yelled back

Gon admired Killua's impassivity at the anger thrown. His eyes were warm- a side Killua suddenly thought he'd probably developed around Gon

"We don't understand, you say. That is your truth. We acknowledge this," Killua breathed. He realized he did not feel well. But he went on "Now, we want you to be open to us. That's our truth... that's the truth we want you to acknowledge. We won't tail you again if you are sincere... If you try to trust us like friends do, if you try to be more open so we can act like friends must." he spoke what he'd learned from Gon "If you let us be your friends to advice you or offer you better choices of action... to let us know you count on us to back you when you go out on your own. You can even just let us back you solely with our words and that would be enough" he felt out of breath "That... that's what Gon's expecting..." the boy trailed "...so we can be better friends for you..."

Kurapica felt the lash as a dagger slice-they were right- and as if a whip he heard himself screeching in wild rage "KILLUA, YOU? YOU FROM ALL CALL OUT TO SINCERITY? REALLY? SERIOUSLY? YOU HAVE THE MOUTH TO SPEAK THOSE WORDS TO ME, Are you that HYPOCRITE? OK, THEN LET'S SPEAK ABOUT YOUR OWN LI"

"KURAPICA" Gon had yelled at the 'hypocrite' but Killua cut the blonde's phrase in time with only one stare.

"Not the same..." His voice a strained whisper.

"KURAPICA!" Leorio called out in delay unbelieving. But the blonde had shut his eyes, abruptly
self-aware at the albino's image. His violet eyes, lit moments before in kindness, had... deadened cold. Leorio interjected hurriedly "It's not only Killua" he diverted attention "We all think this way. What he's saying is true Kurapica, and you can't deny it. I know you don't want anyone close, but well it'd be nice if you stopped hurting us so you avoid being hurt!...because if you let us, we could be better friends for you" The doctor seemed to be speaking for himself as well in another level. "If not, well then we'll be forced to take stupid measures"

"You too..." he whispered. His hand covered his eyes.

Killua's world was turning in stop motion. He just repeated to himself he wasn't there. He would not acknowledge any of the feelings, the room turned slowly on its own volition already. He leaned back...stunned. Afraid.

The blonde teen stood proud and tall as he gave them his back, a hand to his eyes. Like keeping himself from falling of an edge, with the sole force of his knotted fists.

He'd felt angry. He'd felt like screaming- why would someone torture him like that, make him relive over and over the idea of loss... of loss to the same monsters, to their hands and-

- He'd exposed Killua, he hadn't wanted that- he'd never-and yet he had yelled a thousand words. He felt a deep tug- the need to disengage of this burden-friendship and-. In the window's reflection, the albino still seemed frozen. The thoughts began colliding in Kurapica's mind-truths-wrongs-haunting echoes-what was his mission? His first and only mission.

Kurapica slowly sat in silence a hand to his forehead, on the benches.

He knew which one was his true mission. These...these were...trifles...

Gon's honey eyes were drilled to his expression in fire. Killua's stare in contrast was empty. Empty, void, his limbs withdrawn.

Leorio... he sought him.

Leorio's eyes were gentle...

He averted them.

Kurapica kept silent at the impasse. No one spoke and yet the tension was palpable. He'd barely accepted friendship; Leorio knew that first hand... he knew the flash in his eyes that lasted a second and what they read... - I don't want this-desperation-I don't want this.

"You're right" Kurapica slowly nodded... His voice shallow. As if to himself. As if defeated...

Or as if he was willing to lie to them to settle this.

"Kurapica..." The tanned boy called his name softly.

"Gon. You're right" he repeated hollow "you're all right" his voice broke "I'm... sorry..."

"Kurapica...even though we wanted to help... it is our fault. We messed up" Gon stood in front of him.

"It's not" a scrape to his words. "I carried you into this the moment we met and-

Killua interrupted "don't do that." he said in the faintest whisper. "It is our fault" Killua held his weight against the window. "And I deserved that. Do not take responsibility for our actions... just...
"Let Killua and me be your friends" Gon corrected anxious. Leorio was going to say "and me" but suddenly the albino had swayed, ashen, and he rushed to hold his back "Killua"

The albino let him. He was getting used to Leorio. He felt himself laughing, barely able "Kurapica..." violet gaze hazed but steadily directed at the Kuruta "here's... me...being sincere..."

He laughed softly... cold sweat on his brow. "Truth: I... now need your help... if you'd...you'd help me with your healing...stuff... I don't think I can hold on much longer" he couldn't help the soft laugh. It was bitter.

Gon had rushed to his side. But in delay he couldn't help blurt "wow, Killu, you're asking for help"

"shut up" he forced the smile, grinding his teeth, feeling the heavy dead weight of his knee as he tried to move. And couldn't.

Leorio began to help the boy. Kurapica approached humbled, a sad glaze to his blue eyes towards the bundled boy at the bench corner.

"I'm sorry for..." Kurapica trailed.

"It's ok" he echoed the blonde's own words at the ladder...

"...Can you stand up?" Kurapica murmured.

Sincerity? He slowly negated. Leorio was about to spring but Gon beat him.

"I'll lift him" He spoke with one of Killua's arms already over his own. Gon repressed the internal wince, a pang like a rock to his chest- his rib hadn't been treated... but the raven realized Killua's body was deadly cold.

"Killu..." He liked to repeat his name... Killu...Killu...

Leorio took the drenched towel away and Killua felt the fire ablaze down his shoulder again- which was somehow a good sign. It somehow felt like hot melting wax down his arm, inside his veins. He groaned faintly, standing with their help. His vision went black for three seconds and then spotted to colors.

He felt the known prickling tiredness to his every limb, the one that came from blood loss. He'd once analysed the differences. Blood loss felt like small ants sparkling inside his nerves to numbness...Exhaustion felt more like a strain...Electroshocks felt more like needles... Kurapica spoke... he would heal his wounds, he mentioned something about how he could not restore the blood back though- transfusion needed- but his chain snaked around his torso and posed over his wound and white pain blinded him.

"It hurts" he observed.

"Healing? Yes, it does..." he paused "Gon how's your rib."

"It's ok for now" he still held Killua's weight as he could but Killua found he'd slowly fallen to his knees, still in Gon's arms. The floor to his gash was unwelcome. But the wound at his neck seemed...
to lose weight, his shoulder lighter and lighter. "I'll be slow" Kurapica had murmured and the words echoed his mind but he felt he could safely fall back a little, Gon's arms were holding him so and all just waned like a badly tuned radio.

"I'll sleep a little Gon" he wasn't sure he said aloud or on his mind. The albino's head leaned to one side, his knee like an open vessel against the floor. It's over Gon.

No...It isn't.

Leorio had told Kurapica. Kurapica knew.

He had it coming. He'd collapsed in front of the blond in the forest. And he'd sensed Kurapica knew from before and this was the confirmation. The piece of information they possessed was that he'd been somehow attacked...that and that he was a little mentally deranged...He tried to focus with his mind more and more blurry. He would have to invent a story... the fact had just shook him to his bone marrow at the moment, the fact they knew. But it would be easy to lie... And it was all over, wasn't it?

So why did he feel...wrong... his vision had faded to black in glimpses, and arms held him.

He'd escaped hadn't he?

...Maybe worse was...

He hadn't words for it...

Killua they were calling him - but it mingled with the reprimand retold.

You Killua, you- he'd yelled hypocrite, his words were true. He was a liar- You have the mouth to speak those words to me- like a toothbrush over and over- what will Gon say when-that same mouth now holding- and then the words mingled and interlaced and he shut his eyes tight, as his head fell back. Killu- he called him, but he wasn't able to answer. His friends, the material of their acceptance like a crumpling paper tossed away. The kuruta's words- they were spoken with disgust, hadn't they?

- They had. He'd always known the kuruta, chiselled as himself out of his past, only accepted him because of Gon and by default. And he understood. He did not ask for more, he knew he was no saint and did not expect to be treated like an innocent. He did not feel pain... just emptiness. He'd really known this from the start though, he was a loner... Gon himself was probably with him by default - and Killua they called but his vision remained black, only sounds, images, was he asleep or awake? He hadn't understood why the guys had showed up at Kukulu Mountain back then. But it was because they were helping Gon.

He was in a cold metal bed he realized barely, his back cold, he hadn't known how he'd gotten there but his shirt was gone. He wanted his shirt, he heard himself mumbling so and then his voice was gone again. He felt the cold sweat to his brow, his pulse beating slow...slow... he felt a warm hand to his chest, over his heart...He realized as well that he could feel the cold chain to his knee.

He'd known it since the moment he'd landed, all bloodied, in front of him at the woods...the kuruta's expression...

No...He'd known it since the last test of the hunter's exam when he'd... his clawed hand, bloody and he'd crossed the door to leave...

And no one stopped him...

No, he'd known since the beginning.
But Kurapica was calling him. He had helped him...Kurapica had saved him...

But people saved people. Out of a sense of duty. Or out of pity. Sometimes only because it was expected of them to do so...

_Illumi had saved him various times... To keep him alive... to keep him for himself..._

All swirled sickly, they were speaking to him, telling him to stay awake, _but maybe his place wasn't here, wasn’t anywhere_ -He hurt his friends-Who had spoken about families? He hadn’t one- it was a long ago registered fact. It shouldn’t hurt

So why did it hurt?

"Kurapica... thank you" Gon's voice was softly nestled in gratefulness, he saw the wound at Killua's neck gone, the flesh slowly knitting itself, restoring, erasing the damage... Leorio was holding the boy's forehead, speaking to him, stay awake Killu, the longest you can.

"I'm sorry...I am..." the raven spoke

"Gon..." Kurapica trailed. "I didn't mean what I said" he felt young.

"I know" Gon was saying. Kurapica was talking back, and Killua heard Leorio speaking but his head swayed down. His mind was playing scrabble with the words when it all went black.

____________________

_Nanny?...He woke up. But he didn't open his eyes immediately as taught. At once he knew he was in a strange surrounding. He tried to remember where he had been before...there'd been an alleyway fight and..._

_Someone took Killua's hand, and through his lashes he saw the glint of a needle. The reaction was immediate, he'd clawed and retreated two meters away, standing in the bed he'd been. The hair at his nape stood almost electrified._

_A man with golden hair looked at him bewildered. He had a cropped golden beard and warm green eyes but a syringe in his hand._

_"You're awake!" he'd smiled with relief._

_With wisdom he omitted the surprise to see the boy's clawed hand._

_Killua thought he seemed a doctor, glasses and an unbuttoned white apron._

_"what do you want" the boy hissed. The doctor looked at his own hand holding the syringe, and laughed realizing he probably presented a scary._

_"It's ok, boy, I'm sorry I woke you up this abruptly, I promise I am no danger" he waved leaving the syringe inside a box in the counter "I found you in the alleyway and brought you here unconscious. You see, you have a cut in your hand. I was trying to anaesthetise you and stitch that up, and I will if you let me of course. But you can go home whenever you want." He explained trying to sound comforting. He sat in front of the still wary child. "I was worried though because it's quite late... what where you doing in the streets at this time? it's almost eleven"_

_The boy's eyes darkened. Distrust_

_"I'm sorry" The doctor immediately raised his hands. "You don't need to tell me. I only want to help you, rest assured. How old are you kid?" _
“I'm almost eight” he whispered, not sure if it was safe to share that information.

“what's your name?”

“why do you want to know Andree? ” the boy spat, checking the way's out. This dialogue was completely unnecessary... he had to focus in his task. But there was only one door, just behind where the doctor stood.

“How did you know my name” the man asked surprised

“your apron”

The man laughed warmly. The boy calculated he was probably on his early thirties.

" Do you want me to pull you over somewhere? Or you'd rather wait here for someone? IF you want you can have a cup of chocolate with me. Its my favourite drink for cloudy cold days"

The tone in the boy's expression changed. Subtly so. He did climb slowly of the bed. Still guarding his distance though. The doctor had given him his back to pour hot chocolate in two tea cups. Had he been a pro he wouldn't have given his back to his target, Killua thought. The doctor placed a dish with honey bread in the small table on the other side of the room. A small room.

"why is your bed in your living room and kitchen" Killua asked, taking in his surroundings

"oh, that's because that not a bed. Its a folding sofa readied for you to treat your hand well. But my dwelling is quite small that is true." the doctor smiled "chocolate? You'll pardon my enthusiasm, it's just, I'm a lonely person, I don't get visits often"

The scarce pictures that hung on frames revealed the doctor always by the side of a beautiful black haired woman. So he was a liar. He offered one of the cups to Killua. The boy gave a defensive look back, not making any sign of coming closer.

“Oh, you're thinking...well, I'm not going to drug you or poison you. Though you are a smart child because I'm a stranger, you are well taught to be mistrustful. But on my behalf I'm just an amiable stranger that found a kid in the alley late at night and only wants to help you." he assured. He only received a blank stare. "Ok. Let's convince you. Look" Andree took a sip of the boy's cup

"mmm..."He placed the cup at the table. "There, I'm not poisoned. if you want to it's there and if you don't want it, just leave it. I'll drink mine. So tell me again, if you want me to pull you over to you house"

The boy shook his head vigorously. "I have an errand to do..." He trailed. But his errand began at twelve... he had to wait...

In a sense, it was convenient to wait here. He was starving...

The boy still looked distrustful but directed himself slowly to sit at one of the chairs. With an intense opposing stare he observed the doctor

"what are you? a doctor?” he looked with skeptic eyes. Andree sat at the table with the boy and took one of the honey buns.

"oh... sort of. I'm a psychiatrist” He looked at the boy, interested. "who are you, kid?"

"if you knew I'd have to kill you” the boy shrugged. And honestly right now it seemed a pity. He
didn't like killing just because. Only the bad targets...

"do you want me to fix your hand?"

He looked at it... He wondered if Illumi would be angered if he returned with a wound, as minor as it was. It did hurt.

The boy looked slowly up. This man knew he could be killed any moment, but still he offered his help.

"Ok..." the boy's expression humbled

"You owe me" a treacherous voice reached him from behind. A deck of cards playing on his hands.

He just turned to look with dark onyx eyes.

"and you don't know where he is" the jester laughed.

"I will. This isn't over"

Chapter End Notes

A/N: hello my readers, here I am.

I know... I said I'd post this sooner u.u It took me longer because I was two weeks without proper wifi. Now I changed my dwelling (yet again) this weekend because where I was the rent was going to rise and I couldn't afford it! x.x But in here I pay the same AND I have all the internet in the world (you don't know how much I missed that). With internet by my side I'll probably be able to fast pace this story a little.

Maybe you'll feel this chapter is not much. You see, Chapter 20 was twice its size... but since it was the longest chapter in my story and it was growing each day like weed I decided to split it in two. Therefore you shall have again, two chapters in a row :) I'll post 21 as soon as I can as it's pretty much ready.

I'm sorry for the long dialogues... maybe next chapter will be more satisfying...I just felt this need to explore on each of the character's facets, and reactions.

POLL: I have a serious poll for you! it may affect in warnings to come so please do answer me sincerely if you can. How old are you? if you wish to answer but you don't wish this to be public, you can write as unsigned guest or saying "hi, I'm no one, I'm 15" for example... I just want to know how old are the majority of you out there reading. I have already written some of the critical scenes, but there are a few more to come and this is Internet, the true land of the free and brave so I'm rightfully concerned.

Regardless of your age though, I will let it to your freedom of choice whether to read or not if you are teen near to a mature judgement age ...I just want to know more or less of who you are.

Those that are really underage...SHOO. I don't want to hurt you.

Thank you to those who reached to me when I told you I didn't feel well. You are the
best... really... Each of your words mean the world to me, good or bad, I really really appreciate them. I haven't taken the time to answer. Now I'll try to do so.

The next is a personal petition so its Ok if you don't want to. But if you can, wish me luck in my new dwelling. XD I know... it might sound lame but we spend nothing on wishes... I wonder to what gods you pray or if to none, if you believe in fate, destiny, fortune, random chance or arbitrariness. Whatever you believe, I'd do fine with just second hand faith... but if you can wish me this, please wish me an extended stay, and a less rocky life.. -let them not raise me the rent, let my life flow now more stumble free, less eventful and less sadly... so that I can write to you as much as I want to...

Again, thank you for reading.
Hello! Thank you all for your reviews and replies, really... I'm trying to reply to you all but it's a slow process. Thank you my readers =)

**WARNING:** I told you I was going to inform of all the chapter's whose nature could offend anyone. This chapter has a major Warning: explicit content, sexual abuse, child abuse. I did stress that this fanfiction requires adult readers at the beginning of this fic. But I do thank those who have kept up with me up to now and **I do understand** **though that there are all kinds of readers.** For those who are underage—the bunch that Pmed me or were brave to tell me—I know that some of you are mature enough to read. I do encourage you to read only what you feel you are able to manage, and you are encouraged to skip if needs be—it won't affect in terms of plot holes. For you and for all others, young adults as well, you are warned, you will find graphic violence, sexual content and sexual abuse. If you do not want to stumble with these items and something terribly crude, please do not continue when you arrive to the part or skip...

...I won't censor myself, so I can only warn...but I explain myself better in the A/N, at the end of this chapter.

Thank you all.. really, to keep up with me.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

**Music: What If- Emilie Autumn**

He observed each petal contemplative. The flowers, perfectly still in their vase, where disturbed violently.

Leorio slammed the door behind him. He'd finally found Kurapica sitting by the window. The doctor tried to inhale air, not knowing if to salute or to pinpoint or to only echo his name—but he found himself blurring

"What were you thinking?!"

Kurapica closed his eyes.

"...I wasn't thinking...I just..." his voice was hoarse.

"You heard yourself while you yelled?!" The doctor finally could vent all the anger he'd bottled up.
He gave two strides towards the blond "Did you? Or should I recount it to you"

Kurapica nodded emptily. The clear eyes pooled the crystal vase's reflection, not meeting his stare. A pensive gleam to his eyes so precious at the mid-light of the room...

Leorio turned his gaze away. He paced the room ranting heatedly. "No you did not! You said terrible things! Did you have to go spit it at his, their- they were trying to protect you!" he yelled "I mean was it necessary? - We all know Gon is always trying to prove himself but you know why, Kurapica! You know! Do I have to put it in nice simple diagrams for you-Weren't you the smart one?! Because you might have lost all your family, but they did not abandon you at will, have you thought how it must be to prove yourself to gain the right to have a father ah? Oh do tell me at least you knew this! You didn't have a right to speak to him like that- thanks god he acted more of an adult than you did!" Leorio had barely breathed.

"I know..."

"you don't!"

Kurapica lowered his gaze, but that only made Leorio's teeth grind as his voice deepened" and as for Killua-I wanted to punch you Kurapica- I wanted to-to- why! you Kurapica, how could you?!

"I KNOW!" he stood in confrontation "I...know! Leorio, I know! - I was angry- you're standing in front of someone who was cruel on purpose, I lashed at their weaknesses, I was ruthless, calculatedly doing so, to be absolutely certain they wouldn't do something like that again... I only did not measure myself the moment I exposed Killua..."

"You can't use those methods Kurapica!"

"And I'm aware and still will use them. I will make absolutely certain none of the spiders ever touch you. But its better if Killua and Gon hate me and live...than the other option... I couldn't stand..." his eyes were grieved.

No, seeing him like this did not help the doctor do a proper berating. He took a hand to massage his temple

"Argh, you do have an excuse and it's huge! Of course you were angry, you were scared, they were on the enemy's side without any bargain available, you had all the reasons, but" he shook his head
"Look, all of us were fucked up by life and you of all got really fucked up, I know, but that doesn't take away that you still said what you said, you still acted how you did and you can't use those methods! Anger may rise and fall but words cannot be undone, not to them, not to me, you can't act like this!It's like when you ran behind the spiders that night at Yorkshin-have you forgotten that's how Killua and Gon got trapped in the first pla-"

"Stop it" he said weakly... "I know..."

"I won't stop. You think having friends is difficult with a vengeance? then separate them- you had promised you wouldn't be dwelling on the subject-these were vacations!"

"I know..

"Well, this time the boys went in willingly to help you-it wasn't your fault! so why were you so angry?! Because they tried to help you? you said things- and what was said leaves you to account at least to me with answers! So at least stop the excuse and do answer me!"

Kurapica's face was ashen as he stood in front of the doctor.
Leorio's voice turned to deadly seriousness

"What motivates your life Kurapica ah? In truth? Have you really thought it through? You protect us but are we really your friends, am I really anything more than just a passing company?! Do you want to live beyond your revenge?! Ah? Ah? Because-" 

"We've gone through this before" the blonde swiftly turned, his eyes seeking the exit door.

"NO"- Leorio took him by the arm "YOU DON'T GET TO DO THAT! Because you are not only hurting yourself but you're hurting others and I won't let you! Answer me Kurapica!

"I'M NOT HURTING ANYONE AGAIN!"He'd lashed out, sudden emotion in his eyes.

"I'm not" He shut his eyes. He bit his lip. "Look, I regret it, I regret it all Leorio. At the end, I couldn't stand their eyes drilled on me, I value their life so Leorio, they're... you're... I hate them being involved, I hate you being involved, I don't want you to step unto this mess, unto their darkness, their death trail-" 

The obsessive tirade of words made Leorio let him go.

"That...I get... I understand"

"No...You don't understand" Kurapica shook his head weary, not accusingly but...despaired. A silence shelved between them as if they were pages and pages away, books and worlds away...

"You know what Hisoka tantalized me with?." He looked away slowly turning to the windows, his hand suddenly gripping his own shoulder, to stare outside.

Leorio hadn't even known that Hisoka had met him...

"He said... something I already knew... and you knew and Senritsu knew... the joke..." his tone was bitter."That night, at Yorkshin, all chained up, you know He...He still spoke the truth. We were indeed the ones in disadvantage at the hostage exchange, we were... It's engraved in my mind and Kuroro" The blonde was suddenly ranting as he spat the name "he knew this. Because he knew what my weakness was- he detected it the moment he saw me...as if I'd had it imprinted in my face..." Kurapica's voice had suddenly waivered..."between killing the spiders and saving my friends lives I'll choose I'll always choose... I'll..."

He shut his eyes, suddenly loosing his composure unable to stop as if confessing "Leorio, you know it well, Pakunoda died when it should have been Him. She wasn't even at the massacre- but He was, and to his eyes my choice... is my weakness...you guys are my weakness Leorio, and they know it well, and He is but a time-bomb and I can't let you mingle , you, I can't lose- I can't let this make me-" he was stumbling.

"...It won't" his shoulder was taken his firm hand. It rested over his own slender one. Kurapica closed his eyes. His rock...

No... nothing was... and... and...

" I can't...I can't help thinking..." he suddenly seemed to fall apart, his eyes shut tight- "what if...what if the spiders... attacked Killua" he barely managed to phrase it "what if they tortured him the last time as they tortured him now? What if they did... what if they were the ones, and I couldn't do anything- and if they... they..."

"Kurapica" he tried to stop his rant "Kurapica..."
"Don't do that, we're asking him-when Gon goes to call Mitosan we'll ask him right away -but it's over, Kurapica, we lost their track! And I've been thinking a lot, and I really believe I just messed our minds up, I do! Killua just got badly beaten and the spiders haven't been the first ones at that, it's all over."

- He was at all costs trying to pacify the younger one

Kurapica shook his head

"We don't know that- but...we're asking him. We're confronting him." We are...

The blonde felt the firm grasp of Leorio's hand in his shoulder. "Kurapica I promise you, nothing happened to Killua, he's perfectly fine. Both of them are... We all are"

We all are...

---

xxx...xxx...xxx...xxx...xxx...xxx... xxx...xxx

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... His eleventh birthday was months away. He sat in the floor...by the moonlight in the middle of the chamber. His memories were vague, they'd made sure of that, but he still remembered... And despite of it, of all... he was conscious that...

-It doesn't matter, nothing does- he said he repeated, playing with a loose thread of his pajama sleeve- but despite of it he was sorely aware... that he was startled... that he was frightened... As when he'd been seven...

He'd been forced into the routine again for three months now but it didn't matter, did it? Training dictated that every two weeks he ought to be held in the isolation chamber for five days without food and water. He'd been doing just fine-he was refining and perfecting himself as an assassin each day to the large approval-he would not let anyone notice anything out of the ordinary...

But the elder, he'd been taking those chances to visit...

Killua had been acting like he didn't care, it did not matter, nothing did- He closed his eyes. He would not allow fear. Yet dread, ominous dread froze his every limb-the last time it been different...He felt the overcoming dread...He knew he was at the corner of the door, observing him. Those dark dark eyes...

"Will this be the last time I see you Killua? Because I know you little brother...your patterns are predictable... you... run...you always run..."He chanted slowly in the ever quiet monotone...almost wondering.

The elder had approached and knelt beside him. Slowly he began undressing him. He stood under his shadow. The first button undone... The second button.

"Illumi... I don't want to continue" He bit his lip. It'd been but a whisper... But he always began with something-begging-threatening-promising-explaining -he tried to get a response from the elder, he never ceased trying...he seldom got an answer.. Illumi's hand lingered on the last button of his pajama's front. He slowly let the garment slid down one of Killua's shoulders.
For an entire minute he thought he wasn't going to answer as always.

"...Little brother, I think the entire time...you've been afraid about what happened on our last meeting" his onyx eyes hovered over him, his lip curved up subtly. "Isn't it?"

He winced away retreating..."I... don't want this..." he whispered. Illumi slowly retired the garment all together.

"Stop" the boy called desperate, his wide violet eyes seeking him.

"I won't Killua" a tone of gentle patience "...but feel free to go whenever you want" His eyes were devouring his naked torso.

"You know I can't!" he yelled. Killua bit his lip. He felt so weary... and still he felt the cold creep up his throat and he spat

"You...you can be the heir if you want, that's what you want? You have it, just please..." He clenched his eyes as Illumi's ghostly wandering hands brought shivers down his body. Killua's voice rose, his eyes hurt-desperate "hear me out!"

He only had his voice. But he never did hear.

"...do you hate me that much..."

The dark orbs engulfed his naked pale skin, a hand slowly silhouetting his neck... his shoulder... his chest... Killua closed his eyes. Illumi would seldom answer his pleas, always...He would...never see him...And it could be one-it could be a thousand times-he'd never like it. He'd never get used to-

"I don't hate you Killua" he stared with wonder.

He felt his chest get tight, his mind being torn slowly into shreds and tangles.

"But why-"his eyes stung. "Why...this is not tr-training" he whispered. Illumi took his shoulders and Killua went limp "Aniki... please" He uncurled the boy's limbs, almost tenderly. He leaned him softly against the cold ground. Killua still had the question in his eyes as he observed up from Illumi's looming shadow... The black hair fell over his broad shoulders as he leaned to Killua's ear "I don't hate you Killua." He observed him.

"And I don't love you either..."

The boy choked the implications away- slicing retro-meanings to the back of his head-overwhelming twisted knots of meaning. It did not make sense- why-why "then...let me go Illumi... please... I'm nothing to you" Maybe...he would...maybe...

Illumi observed the violet gaze, directing his own into those orbs, filled only with...Killua...

The boy in them read hunger... lust.

"I don't hate you. I don't love you. From time to time I just want you"

Illumi's lips pressed to his own coldly. He slowly forced his mouth open kissing him slowly. The boy felt dead... And then his tongue... with a hand he tilted the boy's head, he was devouring him.

Killua as if awoken, raked his head away messily...

"Don't, Brother just-I'll do all the assignments, I'll do all -just please" Illumi had answered him this
time and suddenly all his hopes had raised as he continued his plea—last time was different—last time had been different—last time

"I sometimes do let you go... Don't I..." Illumi trailed his body impassible... His pants were lowered and Killua immediately stared at one side, feeling his back against the floor, trying to deaden his emotions "It is so... strange...that once so long ago you asked me that exact question..." he traced the silver eyebrows with one delicate finger "mind...it works in strange ways" his hand cupped his nape.

Killua's line of vision was that of the extending floor, the wall on its far edge... he concentrated on the wooden patterns, the crevices... the nightly shadows...It must have been his begging. Or his apparently dejavu question... because the elder continued to speak as he rarely did... and yet he felt like not listening. Like not being there at all. It was his fault—he must have done something, something to make this all start again, he just didn't know what and—Illumi didn't seem about to stop-

"I reckon I sometimes do feel something akin to missing your body" his hand trailed the pale cream skin at his waist. "It becomes an obsession..." his voice had lowered to a whisper. He'd posed his lips on the pallid neck, kissing softly ... as he spoke against his skin "I sometimes do feel anger at you for not understanding... being so stubborn to...subdue" One hand holding him by the waist..."I'm sorry I am...but please-please" the other went further down... "But emotions, they are fleeting... I taught you this. We don't feed of emotions Killua, you and me" his lips gently caressed his collarbone. Killua further strained his head away. His empty stare observing the wall. "We feed on...power"

"No...what if" he suddenly looked at the elder, but met the onyx eyes again and felt paralysed.

"Above all Killua...you miss the key of what is important"

But the boy had turned his head away, and didn't seem about to listen. This wasn't a class to learn, this was just—... he would not be here.

Illumi knew well what to do when that happened, when Killua tuned out. Such expertise he observed of a boy so young. But...

Killua noticed the colds hand lowering...

Raw dread...his fingers brushing his navel and he shivered and bit his tongue. Lowering his boxers...They were fondling him- he shut his eyes tightly—They were playing with him. It was happening again.

"You're feeling"

"NO" his voice was thick

"I like when you start feeling"

A pale hand to his broad chest with all his strength, and Killua separated him. And iron hand flew to clasp his wrist, but Killua had only curled to one side. Hiding the area between his thighs without thinking how it felt "I don't want this" He had his eyes shut. "Brother...I...beg you...please" why would he do that, he had begged He hated... he hated to be pleading... but if there was any chance to avoid this... if there was any chance of this not happening, of him not being there... please... please...

"Do you want to play the coward brother? The beggar? No brother... you must accept what you
are...accept that you are a killer, a sweet killer. Accept you like this as you like to kill. You are even welcome to kill me... as you please"

Brother possessively hugged him, extended against his back, emptying mocking kisses down his spine, his hand gripping him down there, the boy could sense His hardness to his thigh and Killua shut his eyes tight. A kiss turning to a bite to his neck, his fondling intensified. Pleasure building-

He tried to escape; he elbowed a blow backwards and fought away. Illumi grabbed him, and suddenly lifted him from the waist with violence. He was left in all fours.

No- he felt the panic in his chest. And suddenly the boy under him attempted to run messily out. Illumi just pushed him forward as he fought, against the wall.

His chest crushed against the concrete, "no" he mouthed. "Stop Illumi!" His hand took him again" NO-I'll tell them" But Illumi's other hand gripped his waist firmly and accelerated things "you won't Killua. You are a natural liar" a certainty to his voice smiled back "STOP" but it was his fault, his panic triggered the elder

"STOP" but he heard the unbuckling belt, the firm grasp to his waist and he immediately began stretching him-no "NO" the man would not hear, would not hold any longer, wasn't any longer human but a predator as he fought, as he begged- feeling the sickening touch- but didn't he know each plea aroused him- Illumi's head rested on his collar-bone and the hand tensed around his cock suddenly going painfully slow and he felt loathing hit angrily his mouth, revolting- As his own head extended back in a gasp.

"Killua...the key is that whether you ask me or not, whether you are my brother or not... I do this"
He pressed his chest to the boy's back and the boy shivered as he gave him another tug "because I have the power to do so. Just as you kill" one hand clasped his neck "because you can... whatever you do, whatever you ask, however you run" Killua tried tuning out the words "I do this" he felt the piercing dread as an arm rounded his chest to bring him closer

"Because I can"

Killua's teeth gritted when he entered him- PAIN-splintering, flaring, ripping pain- his palms open against the wall to keep him from- he heard his own scream being muffled, the man's hand over his mouth-and he bit it and fought away- but Illumi held him, pushing him forward- the boy shut his eyes - the mechanics of his shoulders against the wall, being gripped by his waist to further- his mouth opened in a gasp-unwanted pleasure up his spine, reaching to a sting in his eyes but Illumi moaned against his shoulder -he heard his name-and he could barely take the other's weight, his hands against the wall to keep him from falling, his knees opened further barely holding himself only too deepen his thrusts- the pleasure and dread building as Killua was panting, no-no-he felt so small- he wasn't there, that body could not take- his body could not take- and Killua's precum was spread along his shaft just to make him conscious of- Killua gasped his forehead leaning against the wall in defeat and hurt- pain-pain and then he gasped a wave of pleasure, painful knot to his throat- and Killua tried to curl into a ball and be oblivious, oblivious, oblivious take him- his lungs panted stinging pain and pleasure entwined into his rough pushes-he hit a spot dead on- and Killua doubled over- and he willed ever so powerful he wasn't there, he ceased to exist, negation of being, he wasn't there, he wasn't, he wasn't any more....he was no more.

But it continued

...God save me... God save me... God save me...Any god out there... any... any... save me... save... me...
...but it continued

...someone save me...someone, help, help, help

...but he was still there...

...someone save me...

But it continued, he was still there, and if there had ever been a god it ceased to exist and if there was any hope it ceased to be and that tore him as he sobbed, no one would ever save him-Illumi pushed him to the floor and it hurt, his hip bones painfully hitting the wooden boards, scraping his skin as he was rocked - The movement stroke him against the floor and he gasped, his body in screaming pain yet his legs buckling against his will in relish, wrongful relish, He thrust relentless and he stifled his gasp, ominous dread, piercing dread and the coiling pleasure heightening, Killua was panting, a hand to the floor- loss of control and panic as his waist was gripped forceful and he felt the pleasure weaving again and again as He hit-his weight crushed him and he could not breath, fear, his body could not bundle the pain, his body could not bundle the pleasure, a hand flew to grip him down there, NO- but He was pumping him again, he gasped, He thrust in hitting- and the growing pleasure strung forceful suddenly white- the sting to his eyes.

His mouth against the floor as his lips opened. His gasp was voiceless

...

...He'd taken all he wanted from him...

All...

All...

He hadn't stopped...not until his arms engulfed him, until he'd pushed deeply in and there was only pain, tearing pain... until felt his thigh smeared and wet and he felt acid at his throat ... Illumi breathed heavily at Killua's neck for some time. Sated. Enraptured in the feeling of possession… utmost possession...

Because I can he'd said.

He felt his own sticky stomach against the wooden boards.

And he wasn't unconscious as he'd hoped for.

No he wasn't.

He'd had to withstand every single second...Illumi pulled away, leaving, sitting in a corner with a smile at the mess he was... this wasn't over...and he had to be there...every lasting second- ever lasting seconds extending onto forever waving, weaving patterns unto his mind… he hadn't been able to stop- burnt facts to his mind and he hadn't been able, it'd happened again, when would it end? When...when...when...

Routes like visions opened in front of his eyes. He saw himself planning the escape, then the hunter exam, Whale Island under the stars, on Yorkshin under the rain, on Greed Island and the cruise, and all the images seemed like ghosts in his mind while still enclosed in the same dark room, he couldn't move to escape and he was still there smeared and stained, and he realized he'd imagined he had a life, but he'd never left, and soon Illumi would come again and the loop would start again, a wrecked ship sinking, and he was still there, seconds, hours, or years on the floor,
stripped of all, and above all... it was true.. Wasn't it ...he was not his own... he was not his own...

He was Illumi's...

If he was, then maybe it would be better to just surrender.

But he couldn't.

If he was not his own, he rather he wasn't...

Yes that suited him... he chose the not to be, over the being handed to someone else... he chose the not to be... he wasn't at all...

He wasn't.

Only then the scenery changed. He was out of the room walking with the weight he could barely hold. One step. In front of the other. A huge window, to its edge, the sea extended in front of him far far below. He wouldn't be. And he took one step, the one final step. To fall, fall, fall, fall...

xxx...xxx...xxx...xxx...xxx...xxx...xxx...xxx...xxx

"KILLUA!"

He sat upright, his own outcry mingling with Gon's. He felt the immediate wave of sickness. His eyes wide open.

Gon was gripping his wrist. Painfully so.

"Killua! GOD you're awake-You were screaming! - It's hard to wake you GEEZ!" Gon ranted anxiously-but stopped as Killua snapped his wrist away- his gaze lost still panting.

"Killu are you all right?" His caramel eyes were a shade darker. Killua took the scene… He was in what seemed a king size bed...

He felt sick to his guts.

"Killu..." it was the third time Gon called him. Killua focused in Gon's image. Gon was alive...his own chest rose and fell but he quickly steadied it.

He couldn't give a rational reason... but for a moment he'd been convinced Gon had died. But he was there, he was there...

Gon tried to reach him… Killua's dark violet eyes were lost and wide…His tanned hand loomed over his shoulder… the wound there was just a tiny scar above, and nothing else…He wanted to take his shoulder, to bring him back.

"Killu-

"Don't touch me" he snapped in a whisper.

Gon pulled away as if burnt.

Killua abruptly lowered his head. His eyes were closed shut. This had happened before.

All over again...again...again... again-he felt the sting to his eyes. He felt sick, sick sick to his guts.
"Where...are...we..." his voice was fogged.

"On a hostel in Flag City" Gon observed Killua's sloping shoulders, lost... "The blimp brought us...remember the blimp?"

Killua's gaze was blank "We need a ship to arrive to Whale Island so we landed here Killu...Leorio did a blood transfusion to you..."

"...A blood transfusion..." he trailed.

"Because of the fight with the phantom brigade. Do you remember? You got shot"

Images flashed in front of his eyes. His head was now a dull aching loading file.

The albino barely spoke "...who..."

"...Me"

He was type 0. Universal donor.

A silence extended, Killua's gaze trailing to the pale hands, his own hands he realized, clasping the sheets.

"...thanks" he whispered

Bits of reality were falling slowly, brick by brick ... He was on a hostel, the neon lights of the city reaching throughout the window - *He was running —again and again—but it would never...bits of the dream, of the memory- they cut just as Hisoka's fight, the blood- he'd almost signed Gon's death hadn't he, hadn't he- but Gon was alive and-

"Gon..." his voice was a whisper. And he realized he'd pulled his knees to himself, his head resting in them... He hid there stunned. *He felt sick. Sick. Sick.*

Gon stood at his side startled. His hand extended in the air...

"I..." His voice broke. His chest wasn't able to hold the things he felt... He wanted to reach out to grasp something, anything, but words could not be formed. "I...w-want it to be over..." the albino whispered."I...want it... to be...over"

"Killu... Killu..." Gon called him softly, his heart thumping wildly. His hand hovered over his shoulders without touching. The silence and reach of his hovering hand suspended, the extending lack of words . He could only repeat his name... he felt helpless

"Gon...I..."

But suddenly Killua tensed. And in one smooth motion he turned to sit at the bed, his feet on the floor, his back to the door. An instant later the aforementioned swung open and Leorio came in.

"How's everything? How are you feeling Gon? Did Killua-

"I'm awake" Killua monotonated. He sat at the edge of the bed, giving them his back, as if nothing. He rubbed his eyes casually. The only thing that could give him away was his tired elbows on his knees... "how long was I out"

"Just some hours, while they brought us here. Kurapica carried you in. You ok?"
"Yes" he muttered

"And Gon, how are you feeling?"

The honey eyes were fixed looking at Killua. The doctor had to ask twice before the raven vaguely out of his thoughts answered "What? Oh I'm fine"

"You're not woozy?" he approached the raven examining his stance. But again Gon did not answer. Killua did not meet the raven's gaze, his own stare wandering through the night skies across the windows. But he did speak.

"Whale Island kid, don't you think Leorio is a piece of strawberry-pie doctor?" his gaze set on the distant night.

Gon assigned meaning to what Killua said slowly. Then he turned at Leorio startled. "He is!" he let out apologetically, as if he'd just gotten the fact the doctor was present in the room. "I'm not woozy! Leorio-san, thanks for your care. It's good to have you as a friend" he forced his smile to a fond stretch.

As Killua heard Leorio chatter -on how come he was called by that linguistic form now when he'd pleaded through all the first year on the 'san'- and Gon arguing back, he thought on how his bet at Gon's ADD had worked out fine.

"Anyway, after arguing at the reception, the heating is working properly now, so you can take a shower if you wish. But there's only one available for us, so take turns and be quick-"

"MINE" Before he'd finished Killua was at his knees in front of Gon as if they'd just been chatting moments before. He registered vaguely the absolute lack of pain which was comfortable anyway.

"Pretty pwease?" he pleaded as if nothing, with catlike orbs. Only a vague gleam in them could betray...

"Yours" Gon feigned the roll of his eyes.

Killua jumped with definitely more spirit than before. They had put him a new shirt but his pants were still on. He still had stains and smears of mud and blood on his arms and cheek and hair and he felt the dirt creeping up his skin almost intolerably. He aimed for the door waving a hand without looking back "Cheerio you guys."

He suddenly turned, dedicating lavender clear eyes to both "thanks".

The door closed.

...

Leorio sat at a corner sofa heavily. He had a folder in his hands.

"IM TIRED" he seemed weary. He always seemed weary around them… Gon had difficulty tuning in, looking longingly at the white door for some seconds. He made a mental effort and turn to look at the doctor.

"Are you well Leorio?"

Leorio sighed but Gon interrupted "Did you get involved in battlefield?" he abruptly questioned concerned
"Are you kidding? I didn't have a chance! I was woken by the airship at my head. No. wait. I actually was woken by strange guys informing me I should climb. One of the crew. I might not have fought against spiders but I think today the world determined not to let me nap. And I'm always grumpy without my nap" he scorns.

Gon immediately knew Kurapica and Leorio had probably fought afterwards. Just basal intuition.

"Besides that, you two don't give us a break, do you?" Leorio added

Gon lowered his gaze. "We did a lot of things wrong" he said regretful.

*What made him, Gon, a monster was that he did an awful lot of things wrong knowingly. Probably would do them again*....

But then, that was a secret only Killua was aware of and for his own to hold. He suddenly remembered Killua, his eyes... He suddenly wanted to go after him...

"...Gon... listen" The doctor paused, his hands clasped together.

"Leorio, I'm sorry, we were stupid and-"

The doctor laughed. "...I was going to say Gon that... next time at least count me in your plan"

Behind his glasses, his eyes had the shadow of a smile.

Gon looked at him in disbelief. And found himself giggling despite his own unease.

"No, I mean it!"

Oh yeah he did, Gon acknowledged smiling.

The kid sat at the edge of the bed as Leorio talked about how he was welcome to see television-he had some forms to sign regarding their operative flee... He explained to him how Netero had resolved that, as in the present the pair wasn't working, their accounts ought to be frozen- a small punishment for the mess at the ship. And so they were low on money again-only got what they had on their pockets- and therefore they were at the cheapest hostel they'd managed to get to.

"Leorio..." The doctor met honey eyes that always looked up at him when troubled. He tried not to think about the fact that the pair's life had been endangered again. Did family or parents feel like this? Did they feel like this the entire time? So... protective?

"Tell me" he spoke gently

"He...Killua is still having those nightmares" Gon's dangling bare feet fidgeted. "He-thrashes" he hesitated... "He screams-"

"That's because he's not taking the pills I gave him" Leorio once again tried to be a firm rock and sound casual.

Gon thought... he hadn't actually known about Killua having pills "How do you know?"

"Because with the many matters my mind deals each day I forgot to give him a prescription that detailed the intake dose." he lifted a finger.

"And on his part, he hasn't even asked. He probably has the ones I gave him still there unopened. Rest assured I will now speak to him"
Actually both Kurapica and him would... on everything...

Gon stood silent… in front of Leorio...his legs hanging, one foot over the other. A vague look...

"Gon" Leorio inhaled, trying to wake the younger one from his reverie "you should call Mitosan after your shower. We're aiming to arrive as soon as possible.

Gon nodded. But then his feet continued to fidget.

"...Leorio... you're wrong..."

"Sorry Gon?" he was puzzled

"I... was thinking that... you're wrong..." he inhaled "Killua...he has nightmares, not because he is not taking pills. That- that only will help. He has nightmares because..." He shrugged disheartened "Because he's haunted..."

Leorio's eyes flashed.

"Aren't you two anyway" the words slipped from his mouth against his will. The doctor immediately bit his lip "well aren't we all..." he tilted his smile "but… at least we're together no?"Pulling the subject away. Gon should not be the one burdened with this.

Gon nodded. Looking at the floor.

Today... in completely different ways he... he had almost lost two friends. Kurapica almost...fled from them...hadn't he? And Killua... Suddenly he felt something akin to regret-regret he knew he'd blocked since that mother foxbear had been killed because of his fault. Overwhelming regret he always, always avoided.

But he now realized that maybe...maybe given another chance he would not do again what he had done today... He would take things back-he'd almost...lost two friends. As hunters they were always at risk but...why he felt so frightened to lose them all?

...xxx...xxx...xxx...xxx...xxx...xxx...xxx...xxx

...The water trickled down his shoulder, down his hair and neck… He lifted his head up, to feel the raining droplets on his forehead and closed lids. He'd tried to make it short for Gon to shower too. But he enjoyed the scalding hot water down his skin. He'd soaped three, five times, more? Cleanse, cleanse, cleanse…

The gash to his knee was gone. The bullet he'd taken was but a phantom feeling down his shoulder. The cut down his front and back-they'd healed- those old nags-- they were gone, half thanks to his own healing rate and half out of Kurapica's specialization, working in unknown ways through his body. The gash to his hipbone was a thin white line.

…Even Gon's blood ran through his veins…

He finally stepped out into the cold bathroom tiles. As the white warm towel dried his skin he felt like nursed to health…

But he could still fathom the labyrinths in his mind. Suddenly he yearned for Gon's company- to stop the dreading thoughts-Hisoka's words; their truth-the dream- he suddenly yearned to shower again
just to feel the cleansing scalding hot once more. He hesitated in front of the mirror, his gaze avoiding the pale body but thinking.

Only one more shower...

A knock was heard. He opened up a little with discomfort. Trying to wrap and cover himself entirely with the towel.

It was Gon. The boy smiled at him from the crevice of the door, carrying a set of neatly folded pajamas. "I thought you’d want yours." He looked at the dripping silver strands amicably and the violet beneath "Their fabric is so soft!" he chirped.

Killua found himself opening the door properly.

"Thanks dude. I don't want to use those rags I was wearing ever again" he pointed to his discarded clothes at one dark corner.

"Not even your favorite shirt? I think the guys have it" Gon smirked sarcastic.

"We can burn it. The shower's yours" He'd let Gon in with familiarity and closed the door behind. Gon's eyes seemed to lighten at the trust. He began talking about his own fight eagerly while simultaneously stripping off his muddy garments.

And Killua felt relief. He amazed at this. He could finally restore that. He... could let Gon near...

The albino had let the towel hanging from his shoulders and unfolded his pajamas listening. He...did not feel shame. If he ever had it was the first time he'd been forced to bath with Gon at his house-so long ago... And after that many more baths and showers came until it was a routine of theirs to share. He ruffled his hair with the fabric, and dried his arms and chest and body. He then pulled the pajamas pants up, assenting and cutting in with ever surprised comments at the battle-Gon was really tough sometimes wasn't he?

And then Gon with a chuckle made him realize the pajama was too huge for him-the material crumbled at his ankles. Putting the long-sleeved top only confirmed that it was meant for a grown tall adult. Nude Gon examined the pajama he’d carried for himself and yes, it was the same oversized cut. There weren't any of their size on the aircraft. Killua laughed-no one was taking him out of his pajama anyway. It was just too cozy.

Gon entered the shower still talking, nothing Killua hadn't seen before, and even though he pulled the curtain not to let the water out, Killua sat at the floor comfortably chatting at him- at the tanned animated blur, that once in a while poked out his head to emphasize.

He'd missed this. He'd missed this so... To be himself with Gon. Not guarded. Not hiding.

Gon seemed to have missed this as much as he had.

Suddenly the conversation had turned to the topic of his own chase at Machi, then him as a hostage-hostage... he snorted...He told the story slowly and accurately...He'd even fought with his yoyos.

By the time Gon was out, already dried and pants up, a towel as well to his shoulders, a small silence settled. One that warned the albino of a much yearned to be asked question, just by staring unto the honeyed depth.

"Killua…what was your plan? You were bound…"
"I hadn't one." He looked at Gon with a drained smile "I was half trying to pull out some sort of trick the entire time. But I couldn't free myself… I couldn't." he hesitated… "Or that's what I thought…" he monotoned.

"And you just didn't tell them a thing. Despite…" he trailed…his voiced hushed thinking on the bullet.

Killua looked down at his pale feet... "It surprises you" There hadn't been disappointment in his voice. He asked…sincerely. He realized he was scared to know the answer; Gon was surprised about him being loyal. But well, whatever he had it coming…Kurapica did see right through him and-

But Gon shook his head, sitting in front of him, his knees pulled up

"Don't mistake me because it doesn't surprise me Killu. You have always defended me in dangerous situations without a single question-sometimes its unnerving! Well, it's not that, it's just... I admire you” his voice at first vigorous, had softened at the end.

Killua did not voice out the thought of how the entire time he'd only tried to act more like that person in front…

"Kurapica...hates us" Gon replied sadly.

"He doesn't hate you... But I would hate us too" Killua assented.

"I got slapped by Leorio"

"I got slapped by Kurapica!" Killua smiled amused and they both laughed. But then Gon asked what he knew was coming. They were both seated so comfortably on the bathroom floor… mirroring each other in the restrictive space.

And he answered. Hisoka had appeared out of the blue… The jester had been searching for the whale island kind as always. Wasn't that predictable- He'd commented but the joke was empty, and he did feel the detached anticipation.

Gon's eyes were friendly, non judgemental. He lost himself sometimes in the caramel color. And he found himself speaking at reasonable ease about the gun, the ricocheting bullet, the saving deck card interred deep, his appearance, the exchange of words- Gon made things so easier….

"Hisoka had bargained with them…The spiders are working with him for some reason"

Gon assented frowning

"I have my theories…" Killua pointed.

"But how…"

The albino assented. "As he was leaving… he" the boy hesitated... " You know how he deviates on the edges of words…well he calculatedly just turned to say …" Gon noticed the subtle tensing of his friend's shoulders blades " he turned to say...fucked up things… twisted things-he-agh-he spoke sick words...and suddenly I was out of my binds fighting him." The violet eyes were hazed lost to the memory. And brought himself back with a shrug "I guess I just needed the ignition" his laugh was hollow. He met the raven's gaze directly

"I… attacked him killer mode Gon. I…became covered in his blood and still he did not attack back,
he just laughed" he did not lower his gaze "and I didn't stop… I just continued to shred him to pieces and he just didn't attack- I was wrong but I couldn't...stop... I was going to kill him"

"I owe him…” Gon interrupted him.

"What?" he'd expected an admonitory call out. Hisoka was Gon's match, Gon to fight. And he'd attacked someone who hadn't fought back. He'd attacked someone who was going to help Gon… he'd-

"He saved you" Gon shrugged.

"Uh?"

Killua took that and then shook his head "no, he was aiming to save you! And I interfered Gon, I-

"No…Killua... by the time he appeared on your scene, with Machi tearing you to pieces, he probably knew quite well I was already at Kurapica’s hands. He came after you just too…. Help you free yourself of your binds. He knew what to say… as horrible as those words were, he knew what to say to make you rage"

"No. No. No" Killua shook his head wildly and Gon noted how his hair, recently dried was wild and fluffy.

Killua felt sick at the thought. His eyes had dropped to the tiled floor his guts twisting. "He hadn't anything to do in the matter" his voice had lowered in a snarl "he just was toying with me, he just was bored, he wanted to play his sick games and played me like a fool, he knew things and just wanted to mess with someone' head, he didn't try to –no- NO- he didn't Gon! Agh the f**ked up scum - I never asked his help! I did not want to be saved!" his fists had clenched.

There was a silence

"Did you just hear yourself?" Gon eyebrow rose. He hid his shock, as best as he could.

"Argh, I meant…"

No… he suddenly understood why he'd been held there… and he hadn't been able to escape… He was strong…he'd just …. He did not process this any further but diverted "I didn't want Hisoka's help!"

"I don't care whoever helped you." Gon's voice lowered "We were fighting together…And I couldn't…"he trailed darkly "I couldn't… help you..."

"I was the one that could not help you!" Killua raised his voice exasperated but Gon at this only laughed. The water drops gleamed on his collarbone, down his tanned skin. He shrugged. "I don't care. I still owe that lunatic clown. You are here…"

"But why- I don't think he was trying to help me Gon, I mean, why me, why would he…I mean... Why?"

"THAT beats me." Gon laughed "but… he did… help you. I'll repay him one day, and then we'll fight" his eyes were full of wonder, of fire. Killua couldn't look at him back. He shone so bright...His own darkness...painfully etched to his conscience. Hisoka helping him. He discarded it out of his mind.

"Killu" Gon's voice suddenly was only a whisper… as Killua looked up he realized Gon was the
one whose head had lowered. He knew what the boy was thinking

"You..." the raven murmured... "Before...you said... you said..."

"I knew you were going to bring it up...I'm...I'm sorry, I..." he hesitated "I had a bad dream, that's all"

"...you said...you wanted it all to be over" he mumbled

Suddenly he extended his hand to Killua's knee, as his eyes rose "well...I promise you it will" his murmured

Killua felt detached. "It is over" he whispered vacantly. His gaze though, rested on the hand to his knee as a safe anchor... And Gon, he did not fall for the monotone... he couldn't help but look at those eyes "We are leaving Killu." his eyes sparkled in determination, the lights of the bathroom pooling to their depth.

Killua lowered his gaze to their hands "we...are..."

"We are going far far away, we're having fun." Gon's tone was anxious.

Killua nodded slowly

"We are going to Whale Island"

"To Mitosan..." the albino added faintly, a yearn to his voice, his head still cast down.

"And I'm showing you how to fish the lake's giant"

Killua smiled faintly...

A silence blanketed them both

"Killu... You won't have to see him again" he voice low. "I promise"

Killua tensed an instant at the mention. He didn't lift his stare. He discerned Gon knew nothing. It was his keen intuition working, that nightly conversation under their created tent, the scene rose in front of his eyes...

He remembered the dream. He felt himself drowning...

As if an echo his hand searched for Gon's hand. As if holding himself into place... He felt the surprise across Gon's skin and for a second he was going to let go in fear. But Gon's fingers interlocked to his own firmly without hesitation as they'd done that night... He felt the warmth of his skin... soothing his chest. Both their gazes were absorbed in that one lock, their firm grip...

They were so alone against the world...sometimes... he thought saddened...

"Gon... thank you..." he said weakly."For being my friend...thank you" he whispered.

Gon felt the albino's strong hold...as if clinging to something solid.

His words...

They hurt.
But tags didn't matter they'd said… so they wouldn't… he wouldn't dare make tags matter. As long as they remained together...

"Thank you Killua… for being my friend" he sealed.

---

Gon and him were sharing a huge bed as always—it was cheaper that way now that they were "broke". Leorio and Kurapica were also sharing, which would definitely cause a bullying chain next breakfast morning—Killua sniggered.

Kurapica had refused to be in the same bed with Leorio, saying he would sleep on the floor. It still was cheaper than renting another separate room in his words and anyway he slept in trees, so no big deal.

All big words the amused friends did not believe.

Leorio said he didn't care, he only was happy to sleep on a bed.

Gon had been sharing with Killua videos in u-tube and laughing on epic fails when he remembered he had to go to call Aunt Mito.

And so he’d been left alone. But it didn't matter, he was hooded by a huge blanket eating crumbles of cookies all spread out in his space of the bed. It began to snow quietly outside and he realized he hadn't a single clue as to where they were located in the planet. But they were heading to Gon's home. He comfortably wrapped himself in the fleece blanket, inside the bed its back against many pillows. It was perfect, in those oversize pajamas, playing his same old game boy, a cookie popping out of his mouth, that he would begin eating as soon as he won this last match—

The door opened unexpected.

"No. We're discussing this later" Leorio was speaking to Kurapica as he entered but the guys were silenced at Killua's startled jump, the cookie falling from his mouth to his lap. Immediately the color rose to his cheeks.

"Is there no privacy in here?! You knock before you enter! It's a RULE!" he protested, the back of his hands swiftly cleaning the crumbles in his face.

Leorio was smiling widely at the blanket-boy wrap "Wow…I think now I have seen it all…Killua Zoldick, you look so …adorable!"

"Shut up." He said, lowering his fleece hoodie away "And go and take a look at the mirror"

He had a point. Kurapica was dressed, but Leorio was on a two piece white pajamas with little hearts stamped all over.

"Oh well, that's what they had on the blimp, you know, all my clothing was dirty, and they only had this…"

Killua cut them short "What are you doing here. You're supposed to be in your room having sexy time"

The blonde rolled his eyes "Ok Killua, guess what, new plans: I can't take the jokes. So you sleep
with Leorio and I'll sleep with Gon.

The boy in the bed paled "No!" he squealed horrified "You mean it? Please don't! Leorio snores!"

"I don't snore!" Leorio eyes widened abashed. Both Killua and Kurapica turned his head at the doctor in sync.

"You do"

Killua felt the game boy vibrate in his hands, and the three notes melody indicating he'd lost. "Well, I really hate you right now..." he scorned tossing aside the game boy "are you here to change rooms? I know you guys are always fighting but please don't, this has been the arrangement since forever"

"No... it's not that" Leorio rolled his eyes "you can take Gon. I'll take the difficult one here" Leorio smiled.

"Again, I'm not the one who snores..." Kurapica sighed. But he looked at Killua with a depth that taught him bad news. The blonde brought a chair next the bed, action that Leorio echoed which wasn't any better. Killua knew exactly what this was about but still his guts dropped. Both elders were looking at him.

"Ok Killua..." Leorio trailed. The boy tossed his blanket to one side.

"This seems a cross examination. Yes Leorio"

"Well, we were here because... we wanted to ask you ...if you are fine" Leorio tried to synthesize. Ineffectively so and Kurapica shook his head- hadn't they prepared this? Leorio seemed utterly lost.

"And you came together to ask me this. What, did you corner Gon too for an interrogatory as well?" He turned to the blonde, the cool stare already adopted "Kurapica, if you're here to ask about what information we might have leaked, well rest assured we did not leak a thing. You happy?" The dark violet was cold.

"I'm not here for that" Kurapica said patiently.

"No, you're here to ask if I am fine. Well I am. Tell me again why wouldn't I be?" He spoke calmly, and looked at Leorio, those same panther eyes. Oh, his defenses were barbed-wire high.

Leorio remained silent for a second. But Kurapica interrupted.

"I don't know about Leorio, but I think you definitely weren't well back in the forest" he did not blink.

"That is true, I agree. I had a gun shot to my neck" Killua tilted his head.

"Killua, with your gunshot and all, at the end you carried me to the airship."

Leorio's brow furrowed in question at this but Killua abruptly stood from the bed, away from them. He aimed at the mini bar-one he'd stolen from the ship and packed in his suitcase.

"isn't that the-" but none of them heard him as Kurapica spoke over Leorio "So I can only conclude it was not the wound that did that to you"

"Well, it was exactly what you saw, nothing more, nothing less. I had a breakdown. End of the story." He took a beer from the fridge and the boy leaned against the wall with ease to his movements,"However Kurapica you are not here to question me about that. You have other
questions. What you meant to yell at me at the blimp—before you stopped yourself, maybe that? So, quoting Gon spit it.” nonchalant aggressiveness in his voice, simultaneously opening the tap.

"Hey—" Leorio raised a hand, half to stop the boy from the chosen beverage, but he met a chilling stare.

"What"

Leorio lowered his head. But he inhaled "I'll exchange you that beer for this chocolate bar" He tried to sound convincing. For an instant, the violet eyes softened.

But the cold stare was again adopted. He looked at the ground..

"...You... told him eh? no news there" he said lowly. There was a silence as Kurapica figured out the message's receipt was Leorio. However his silky voice, the mauvine eyes weren't accusing. They were... sad...staring at the floor.

"No. Killua I didn't" Leorio stood but Killua didn't raise his gaze.

"It doesn't matter" his demeanor morose. "What do you want, I'm tired" he sat on a far off chair beside the table. Elbows to his knees as he took an unconscious swig of the can.

Kurapica took a step "Killua, Leorio didn't tell me a thing. I saw your bruises way back when you went to Pandora. I heard you guys talk by the pool. I was the one to confront Leorio as you weren't speaking"

Killua eyes flashed—Undoubtedly taken aback. But it only lasted a second as it was masked with that chilling hollowness, not once lifting his gaze.

"...Well Kurapica, maybe I wasn't speaking for a good reason..."

So both knew. From here there was no use in trying to act as if nothing had happened. They knew he was attacked. There was no turning back- He only could manipulate the story from now on... He hadn't noticed when his knees had bent and when his arms wrapped them, his beer hanging from one of his hands. Well- from the moment he'd realized Kurapica knew- the blimp- and awakening now, he hadn't had much time to invent a story.

Leorio approached the boy. Just a step, but Killua subtly seemed to recoil against his seat, avoidant.

"Killua... is that reason...gone?"

Killua's glare at the floor seemed to falter. He kept silent. He didn't know what to answer. He'd foreseen this conversation, but he hadn't foreseen the tightness of his chest... He inhaled. There weren't words...

"You're not sure" Kurapica tried to read him. "You're not sure the threat is gone...Killua... did they threaten your life?"

"I don't want to talk about this" he stood abruptly and aimed for the door with another sip of the beer.

"Wait" Leorio took his shoulder from behind. The boy tensed and backed away with a strange expression. Leorio faltered but Kurapica seemed unphased by this as he still approached the albino.

"Killua, all that you said, about me being sincere so you can be better friends, why don't—"

"Oh yeah, and the part you yelled about me being a hypocrite, Kurapica, well, what can I say? It's
absolutely true. I'm sorry, I'm a liar, a hypocrite, a sham, maybe not a single word of what I said to you before was true cause I'm a Zoldick right? But again, maybe you're the one that's right, friendship is overrated" His words sharply edged as a paper cut as he turned to leave.

Kurapica held him, his serenity unabated. He felt the shoulder stiffen under his hand and the muscles tensing in attempt of shoving him away but the taller one did not let him go.

"If it's so overrated, Killua why are you protecting him at all costs?"

The words settled, freezing the albino. His fist had clenched, even the one holding his beer. Kurapica's hand on his skin felt intolerable, he'd just showered himself clean and he only wanted to wash his hand away along with his words.

"Who says I am protecting anyone?" he snarled, his thoughts in full speed collisions inside his head.

"If you were not, you would have just shrugged right at the beginning of this conversation"

The boy seemed rigid under his grasp giving him his back. Kurapica couldn't see him; he only saw his downcast figure. But the voice that reached him was hoarse.

"Pl-please… let go off me…"

Something in his voice made Kurapica release him slowly.

Killua, still giving them his back, turned his shoulder blades, as if shaking something off. He wanted to lie, as he always did. He'd planned to lie, all along. But he couldn't, somehow all he'd been through, the entire time he'd been there…again, and again, his head had pleaded for the chance to ask for help, help, help. But he couldn't he had to remain strong in his decision—oh but the damned what if was killing him—killing him—

"Killua…" Leorio spoke softly from behind, as if knowing his thoughts were about to drown him on their weight. Killua felt the chocolate bar being put in his free hand. Killua exhaled slowly. There was no need to panic. It was all ok; it was all according to plan. He took a long swig out of the can and turned to handle it to Leorio.

"There…” he trailed, his gaze lowered. Well… it was almost empty. The boy sat on the bed as he tore the chocolate's foil wrapper with his teeth. He wouldn't meet their stares, there weren't' answers there. Kurapica took again his chair to sit right in front of the boy.

"Killua, we're at the end of the world. There's no possibility someone is chasing us. You can be sure of that, you and Gon are safe."

Leorio seconded him "Killu, you can trust us. The committee made sure we were secured. You are protected"

"Do you trust us?" Kurapica asked him… in a deja vu like reflection…

"Of course I do- it's, it's just-" But he stumbled stricken.—Do not tell. Never tell-But Killua what if, what if?- Protect him- but he hadn't heard of-of Brother- but he'd always follow him and it would never ever end-but maybe he could maybe he could tell them- maybe they could help him- they could help him drive Brother away—could they? They would try to help him, he knew—his friends would try to help him at all costs- yes, of course not telling all, just the ask for help help- because he needed help—he needed help—he opened his mouth- HE NEEDED—

And a razor-like image sliced through, as a lighting.
His heart had stopped. And then he wasn't there- but he'd lied on the bed-naked-the blanket under his palms, his body limp-dead-dead-the man at the door- he could not move- Oh and one last thing Killua-it repeated like echoes- One last thing-his lips moved slowly-Tell anyone...and I'll take him away with me. Until you find his small tanned body floating overseas

His eyes shut tight.

"Killua" Leorio immediately shook the boy knowing where this was going. Killua winced away. Effectively responding. His heart now thumping a hundred the minute.

He could not bear to loose...

...If you tell- he'd said- never to tell-years and years- The threat...the deal...the threat was real- as real as all of the man's threats had always been- and Gon- Gon-Gon..

He tried to bring himself back to his hands clasping the tight jeans in his knees not to loose it standing to close the edge.

Kurapica's stare was intent on him. They both were but he couldn't... he couldn't-

"I-I-trust you... it's just... I'm..." for the first time he spoke again after an entire minute silent

He hated to admit it and as if a reflex he laughed bitterly "I-I'm ..."

Afraid....

"Being prudent... prudent about this... I can't-"

"So you were threatened? Are you saying you were attacked and they did threaten-?"

"Leorio" Kurapica interrupted him with a warning look -not to make the boy retreat- just as Killua brow cringed at the words, but the blonde immediately called his name, directing his gaze towards the smaller one, his eyes rock firm, forcing him to look up.

"Killua, we swear to you it is safe to speak. That's one of the reasons we left the ship. And not only that, but, if there ever is actual retaliation, the moment you do trust us, the consequences will be assumed by us all"

Killua stare was lost in the ground. He understood...He nodded. He'd foreseen that as well...

"Did they attack you Killua? Back in the ship?" Kurapica asked calmly, almost coldly. Somehow the apparent lack of empathy took away the issue's gravity.

Killua sensed the tight knot at his throat and realized he still couldn't speak well. He slowly nodded. Not knowing at all what he was doing. Panic at the unwritten play ahead was slowly taking hold of him. He clasped tighter his jeans, the chocolate had vanished somehow, and he wanted his beer back and-

"How were you hurt?" Kurapica's voice was soft

He swallowed the knot, trying to speak "it doesn't matter much, does it? I've already healed"

"I still want to know" The blonde proceeded
"Well...w-what Leorio saw…" He looked at the doctor for help suddenly… But Leorio kept quiet. They'd spoken about this, Killua had to speak- he had to be the one to speak...

"What was it that Leorio saw? I didn't get to know" Kurapica replied gently.

"…nothing I haven't received before…" he spoke weakly.

That bit, he suddenly realized that last sentence was completely true. In all meaning levels. He had received nothing he hadn't received years past, nothing he wasn't prepared to receive as taught, nothing he did not deserve, nothing they would understand or needed to know, nothing he could not manage...

The only thing that had shaken him was ...the threat wasn't it? The otherness hadn't happened first place- and what had happened was nothing new. From that truth, first spoken, as if leveraged it became easier to tell of his other wounds as if a supermarket list "they cut my chest, my back, my hip… and they beat me, and broke my wrist. Pretty much it" He even assumed the formula "they" out of Kurapica's own words wittily. It was better to confuse them about the aggressor this way…

"You had carved a word" Leorio abruptly mumbled seeking the boy. As if he'd kept the doubt since that day

...that day... Killua tried to keep steady

"Yes... you got to see it?"

"No but why, why did they ...carve you" the verb was difficult to spell out "with something?"

"Because they're bastards?" Killua said vexed and amused- all a mask of his own panic. He diverted "they carved the answer to one of my questions. That was all" -taking their mind of the attacker into the attack, trying to spin the web of a legitimate or credible story... still no ideas would come-Gon come in-Gon interrupt...

Gon...

The doctor was unrelenting "What-" But Kurapica had interrupted Leorio

"Killua… who… who was the one that did this to you?" His light blue eyes flashed.

Killua's heart beat loudly in his chest. He wondered if they could hear it, if they could hear it at his throat. Right at the end, the blonde had changed the language form-he'd noticed detached- he said "who was the one" instead of "who were the ones" and suddenly he felt more unsafe . He could… speak…. the word, the answer… and let it all fall, fall fall. All his cards, all of Gon's cards, all of their destinies attached, drop scattered to his feet, he would not be in control but he'd receive help, he could receive help—but then he would not be able to foresee the outcome. But didn't he know all ready too well, he wasn't the one with luck- he'd never escaped-he couldn't. But Gon would escape...would he?- Him observing- Gon- There's this boy Killua...so much stamina-Him, Him, Him in every shadow- wouldn't it be nice to play with hi-Killua-if you tell-his body- Killua listen-overseas-

He took his hands to his head

"Where's Gon?" He suddenly spoke his eyes glazed.

Kurapica, took his cell phone from his pocket ready for this.

"Look for yourself"
Gon was in the screen, as if being recorded by a hidden camera from above. A phone hung to his hand. He was laughing.

"We are safe" Kurapica repeated. "...Killua...you must tell us who...we-are-safe- You must tell us who"

But he remained silent, his elbows to his knees, his head hanging, his eyes shut.

*He could not*

Kurapica repeated the question.

*He could not*

Who-

*the words the blonde spoke blurred into a scrambling chaos of vowels, to the echoes... the screams inside his dreams vivid, vivid...I can't- If you tell Killua*

He stared at Kurapica, unlooking.

*I can't...*

*I...can't...*

"Killua" the silence was too extended, the lack of words, the things unsaid, the silence and the lost stare, he tried to call him back "Killua" a firm adamant voice reached him.

He snapped his head... his eyes glazed...

Suddenly, Kurapica's voice hesitated. "Killua" Leorio immediately sensed the break in the aloof stance of the blonde as he asked unable to stop himself "Please... do at least tell me if it involves me- was it the...phantom brigade? You must tell me- Did they attack you back at Pandora? Did they threaten to kill Gon if you told us about what happened? Who was it? who attacked you-Was it them?"

His eyes...that's all Killua took note of at first.

Leorio realized that the blonde wasn't handling Killua's silence any better than he was.

Suddenly the boy was struck. He realized that if he let Kurapica speak his theories, it would come out on its own, the story he needed. And that's how evil he was.. that's how selfish he was... Gon that's the monster I am.. Gon.. Gon..

Biting his lip, as if throwing a risky dice, he slowly nodded. Oh it was immediate..an agonizingly slow rip, like cloth tearing strongly inside, Kurapica's gaze taking in the information... *He was a liar... he'd warned them he was a liar.*

"They were" his voice faint...

Killua could not nod again. He just stared to his own palms.

"They told you something like they would permanently track you to use you against my will isn't it? And then they told you not to share this or Gon-"Kurapica's voice increased in anxiety, in speed, his eyes fixed on the boy's frame...
And Killua nodded. The disjointed wring twisting inside his chest—as he took in Kurapica's expression, his slumping shoulders, his shocked gaze. Killua shut his eyes. *This is for Gon... this is for Gon.* He knew they would be completely convinced and leave the issue alone—they ought to stay away from this for their own safety as well. It was their guilt and safety... rather than their meaningless death in a quarrel meant only for two...

Yet... *He knew how bad he was hurting the one in front... he knew, he knew, he knew, he knew*

The kuruta took this last gesture—the boy's eyes closed tight—as confirmation sign of all he'd suspected. The phantom brigade had threatened the boy. Now, not only he, Kurapica feared them... Killua did so as well. So much as to paralyse him. So much as to render him wordless...

Kurapica couldn't help the hand to his, remain collected—for them all. He adopted the callous mask again, not showing the horror he felt.

"Killua what was the question?"

"Uh"

"They carved you the answer to a question... which question was it?"

Killua's stare was dead into the carpeted ground.

"Why" the word flew from his lips without a second thought.

"Why what?"

Killua remained silent. "It... it was a why to many things..." he whispered. There were many whys unanswered many oh so many- to the silent murders, to the lack of justice, the slaughter and vice-gripping misery humanity was rendered to be, to always be- the many whys...

"What was the answer?"

Killua took a deep breath. To see Kurapica like this... *desperate*... But it was better; it was the safest way... Now the actual carved word would immediately indicate them his... his aggressor. The words again flew of his mouth... As if lies mingled with truths were better spoken than lies on their own

"*Because I can.* That was the answer"

The words echoed in the room.

Kurapica stood abruptly, unable to repress himself. Simultaneously the doctor stood, a hand to the blonde's shoulder. Killua couldn't look. He just couldn't look. The weight of his own words left unsaid, of his own hurting lies- they seemed to be related to the scarcity of air "I'm... sorry... Kurapica, I'm sorry I'm."

"What?! *I'm* sorry Killua!" the blonde let out of breath. "I'm... so... so..."

"Don't... please don't... it's not your fault Kurapica, and they didn't do anything but threat, empty words" Killua shook his head vigorously."it was nothing"

"It was not nothing..." the blonde barely whispered."You... taking things in your own hands, that's why you confronted them, wasn't it? Gon didn't know, but you took matters into your own hands today, that's why you meddled into my affairs—you were brought to them unwilling on the first place ...and..."
Killua felt the wave of guilt, shame, his words weren't true. He'd been just as lazy as Gon. He'd just wanted to help; it hadn't been heroism, but simple solidarity. It hadn't been out of an invented threat or something, but to actually just help Kurapica get a hostage. He kept silent, wondering how much he could stand of this pretense.

"It'd always been so easy to pretend, to lie around people he didn't give a damn about. Now…"

But Kurapica seemed unable to withhold his questions, his assumptions, speaking out of the raw-

"Killua, they didn't want me to know they still considered you valuable hostages…didn't they? That's why they silenced you- They didn't want me to know they'd coerce your actions, and my actions through yours, they didn't want me to know they'd infiltrated fear into our group, acting like that from within…"

"No-I never-I did not intend" The albino stood shaking his head.

"Killua, you took the best path you could at all times… you were always protecting us"

The albino closed his open mouth. He once again recollected himself "Kurapica, now I'm fine, and they aren't here, it is over-let's just…"*forget this. It did not happen…"

As if sensing the anxiety of the younger one, Kurapica took a hand to his head and inhaled. He turned gently, with soothing eyes"It is over now." The light blue now candid pools- *with all the effort Kurapica could muster "Now that you told us we can work this together… Now you are not alone on this." He smiled faintly. There was only a subtle trace in his expression of how violently he'd been shaken.

Killua felt himself swaying in his feet. That last words weren't true either. He was alone. They all were... "But now its a thing past Kurapica, we ought to let it go... it is over now isn't it?"

"Killua" Kurapica's tone turned serious "I don't ever want you to burden yourself with something like this again. I know you tend to that and I know it's your nature but promise me you won't. Promise me you will seek for help if you are threatened, if you are in trouble"

Killua knew the exact words to close this farce- these lies stuck to him like spider webs.

"I promise you…if you promise to do so as well" the younger one spoke emptily. But, aware of this, he repeated the line again, this time with a convincing tone and an actually fake but genuine looking smile. Gon would had spoken that line...and Killua knew they'd bought it all and he realized it made him sick and yet he tried to clear his expression from any trouble for both of them, acting what would feel like relief, what would have felt like had he been unburdened. Sensing the deep abyss in front of his feet.

Kurapica nodded "I promise. I vow to you I won't be as I was before. You and Gon had a point and I take it. I promise you Killua I will be sincere"

"Pinky promise!" suddenly Leorio interjected. They both looked at him skeptic but he continued "pinky promise *now*, the pinky promise is unbreakable. Gon would back me on this one here"

Kurapica exhaled almost rolling his eyes. But he held his pinky awkwardly, playing along "I pinky promise"

"I pinky promise too" Killua went through the acts reluctant as their pinkies locked.

"Don't ever betray your friends" his father's voice...
He just had to keep laser focused. He repeated this line in his head.

"Guys… I told you this... but I need you not to tell Gon" Leorio was surprised by the hidden despair in the violet gaze.

"Why Killu?" Leorio questioned "it is all over for real"

"We do not know that" The boy insisted. "But I do know Gon is rash. He acts impulsively…if he knew all this ordeal maybe he would go and try to avenge us and I can't let him…I can't. I can't-"

But Kurapica nodded comprehensively

"He's right Leorio. Maybe in the future. But right now, telling him will only be counter-productive. He's difficult to contain..."

"Yes he is" Leorio sighed.

"I'm ...sorry guys... for keeping this...for making you worry, it was nothing... I didn't mean to-" lie

"It was not nothing Killua"

"I did not want to worry you, I'm fine, really. Kurapica...it wasn't your fault. ok? get it please"

"Don't linger on that. Killua, remember... if you are in trouble...please come to us. We're here, available"

Killua nodded wearily. "yeah yeah yeah...I'm..." he exhaled "I'm tired... just a sec" he aimed for the bed where he'd been interred before the intervention, exhausted.

"Killua..." The blonde trailed...

"Want a cookie?" he offered the guys, trying to act as if nothing had happened. But the blond approached the boy in the bed and knelt, a hand to the boy's arm

"Killua…thank you…really…" and his eyes were so sincere. He most assuredly thought he now felt numb and dead but no. That look just deepened the rip in his chest "I did not intend you to go through this"

"I know" was that... Kurapica's actual... care?...He felt empty. Hollow... Somehow...at a moment of that day he'd felt burning to his skin Kurapica's image of him as he yelled: a killer, a liar,one not to be befriended-he'd always thought that was the image the Kuruta had of him: just another Killer. He'd never thought Kurapica considered him a ...friend...

But now that all his preconceived judgements turned out to be not real but a remnant of his paranoid defensive mind, now that Kurapica was knelt there in front, choosing to support him over fleeing them...caring for him as if his past did not count at all, seeing him for who he was right there, right now...Actually trying to see him.

And him having lied. It all proved he actually was the killer, the liar, the one...not to be...befriended

"I should have been able..." Killua's voice was low "I should have been able..."

"No,Killua No. It was a decision that shouldn't have been placed on your shoulders on the first place. Killua...I'm indebted to you...and I admire you... I'm glad I'm your friend"

twisting guts- "You tried your best to protect Gon, and me, and us... I won't forget this" a knife stuck in deeper. His blue eyes were warm. The blond bit his lip, but then he stood and aimed for the
They'd spoken about this. All the ways in which they would approach the boy so that he did not feel cornered to lie, so that they could drift towards the truth knowing the height of the albino's fences. And they'd agreed on this. Actually Kurapica had suggested it- *I'm his friend Leorio but he doesn't trust me that much. But he does trust you. He'll feel safer in a one to one conversation. You have to try...insist, please insist... try...try your best...please...try your best... we have to know what happened* 

The blonde had taken his cue "Guys I'll leave you two here, Gon's out of the sight of my cell phone, so I'm going to get him." He excused.

"Gon's-" Killua blurted

"He's fine. You'll see how I bring him in one piece. I'll join you shortly"

And he'd left.

Killua shook his head. If he took one, only one second inside his crowded mind, he would collapse. He immediately turned to Leorio "you want a cookie?" He directed to the doctor a clear lavender gaze, the best he could muster. The doctor's brow creased…

"I've been meaning to ask you something Killu"

The boy suddenly liked the word Killu on the doctor's speech feeling beyond exhausted *not to be befriended*. He let himself fall like a potato sac against the pillows

"Shoot"

"When they ….first attacked you…you were in a real bad state" Killua imperceptibly tensed. So they were still at it.

The show must go on...show must go on...show must go on...

"Yeah… I was a wreck…” Killua scratched his back shrugging.

"Did…” Leorio inhaled "did they do anything else to you"

"No" he said simply "I mean… you saw me…er...the cut in front, the one in the back-"

"Yes…but…” he tried to sound firm "did they hurt you in any other way?"

"mmm... I mean…yeah, they tortured me.” He tried to shrug off.

Leorio insisted "I'm sorry I'm asking but I need to know… how did they torture you"

"You honestly want the details? They cut me…they beat me.. they broke the much it"

"With what did they cut you?"

"A pocket knife" he felt a string to his chest *at the sudden image of the upraised weapon*.

"Did they do anything else to hurt you… "

Killua focused his stare on the doctor's tie.
"What else could they do?" his eyes were clear as his head tilted.

It was almost unnerving.

"You...you were shaken by that...weren't you ... because of how they hurt you"

Killua's eyes darkened.

"You're right... there is something else they did...they threatened Gon" he was looking at his hands
"for all the rest...I was pretty much prepared for...but that..."

That was finally true.

"Oh god I keep forgetting that." Leorio nodded. The doctor tried to swallow...dryly... Somehow...he wasn't sure that the boy...

"Killu...and how are you now?"

"I'm fine...wasn't that the entire reason of your cornering the poor boy unexpected on the safety of his sleeping chamber?" he raised a sarcastic eyebrow

Leorio remained serious, exhaling "Your sleep..."

"...that..." he trailed... "Well...I do need help with that..."

"You're not taking the pills I gave you are you?"

He slowly shook his head

"I...it was more out of laziness... I keep forgetting"

"Here" the doctor took a paper out of its pocket "is the dosage. This I calculated with rigorous mathematics and what I learned treating you that day at the nursery. The pills I gave you...they are Nen induced. As your body is physically resistant to all drugs... I concluded Nen and a strong dosage was necessary- God that day was stressful. You know playing with Nen is dangerous. But I figured you out." he commented. Killua had to take his time to admire the skill of the doctor "well, you take them...and you should be able to have a sound sleep at night. I'll knock you off. You must take them early in the night- they take one hour to have effect and if you take them too late, you'll wake up late as well. Also we must consider that I can't give you this dosage out of nothing. You'll be increasing from zero to 2 mg by quarters every four nights ok?"

"Why?"

"I'm no psychiatrist and that scares the hell out of me. So we are doing this by the manual"

"Ok..." Killua nodded obedient. But his expression wavered...

"Leorio..." he hesitated..."I'm....well... it's all been stressful hasn't it and... I ...lost...it...again... back there at the forest...I...like...when...."

"Yes...that... Killu, it has as a name. It's-"

"I don't care...I just...you have something for that too? I don't want to go losing my head in every battle you know..."

Leorio wished he could tell the boy it wasn't that simple. Haunted he'd said...
"It's complicated...But I'll work on it. Really, homework for me, I'll consult colleague hunters."

Killua seemed relieved.

Just then Gon exploded into the room

"KILLUA!" he launched towards the bed and for the first time the albino's chest soothed "I have so much to tell you! Mitosan is expecting us with our favorite food, and she's got presents for us! And she told me Gonta's child is already growing! And grandma and Mito helped delivering a baby in the island!" Gon radiated excitement...

Kurapica waited by the door as the doctor waved goodbye-not without a phrase of the boys akin to something like "have a good sexy time-or something of the sort.

Outside he sought Leorio eyes, distressed, trying to read any answer in them. Leorio negated with a movement of his head. He'd only been beaten- though the 'only' was badly positioned in there...but nothing else...

Inside Killua turned at Gon anxious, pleading if they could watch a movie- Saw I- he needed his mind to be distracted, he desperately needed it. Gon acquiesced sensing something was wrong, but just rolled his eyes at his friend's likes in movies.

...

xxx...xxx...xxx...xxx...xxx...xxx...xxx...xxx...xxx

Almost Four am and the hour painted scenes to each mind.

Kurapica had disappeared right after their conversation with Killua...He was nowhere in the hostel. Leorio had been left alone to his thoughts… Somehow it'd all gone well…and yet the doctor's heart was at unease… He'd been restless. He'd tried seeing movies-reading. But he gave up to his mattress. Still awake.

As the first minutes of Time's handles turned slowly to a new hour, the door opened. Leorio felt a body slump over the bed. It was the blond. As Leorio realized he'd fallen on top of the covers still dressed he approached. And smelt the alcohol.

"Kurapica"

But his friend was giving him his back, his tresses messily spread against the mattress. Leorio incorporated. He found his now dark blue eyes blankly fixed in the wall...

Leorio couldn't help it. He took the small fisted hand against the bed. "Hey"

Kurapica closed his eyes, as if shunning from him, suddenly curling, his grip tightening against the blankets.

Only then Leorio noticed the wet trail on his right cheek.

"Hey, hey-"

"It's my fault" his eyes shut tight-he barely breathed. Leorio took his thumb to clear away the tears, repeating it wasn't, it wasn't his fault, and he knew whose fault it was-the phantom brigade-it'd never been his fault. The blond shook his head, a hand to his mouth as he abruptly sat, he negated, and he
could not believe...he felt the warm hand caressing his nape, the other slowly trying to take his hand from his mouth-it's ok, Kurapica, look at me, please believe me...
That was all it took for the blonde to turn- his lips seeking his own, the blonde was kissing him wildly, desperately. As if trying to drink from him a relief to his blazing lungs, searching under his clothes as if for answers, his embrace tight, clasped to his shoulders as if hanging from a cliff, afraid of a tidal wave to come, kissing him harshly, deeply, his clothes gone. Just as last time and the time before that...they were both drowning...

After it all, the blonde had separated, and curled to his own side of the bed, not even an acknowledging glance or just passed out. As always;

The doctor's body was trailed by his saliva. He looked at the blonde's sleeping form. He turned to the roof. His eyes were unwilling to close.

He felt the empty taste of the alcohol in his lips, his kisses now gone as ghosts again his lips. But they'd gone through the moves to many times for him to care...

Killua had lied. In something. He didn't know what but he'd lied.

He felt lost... His mind took him to his faraway interred memories as if to suit his glum melancholy. That face revisited him, past images to a candle light like a road a hundred times travelled...He saw him, that lost boy... The first friend. The first friend he'd ever had. His first lover. His first kiss. His first death. His reason to become a hunter. It'd been so long he could not remember his eyes well, their colour... It was so long he did not feel love or anything but a sweet wistfulness, so long he'd turned into a symbol...of the haven's that don't last...of the things he could not change...

He couldn't know Killua, at the moment sat in a corner of his room, awake, hours on end staring in silence at the window. His still silhouette sometimes faded against the wall. He was hollow.

It was his own fault- it was his own matter to settle, he could not risk anyone-Together they still wouldn't be able to hold Him back-he could not risk Gon, he could not risk the guys-his...his...friends- he didn't know if he was being followed or not and telling would've only accomplish retaliation that the four could not take together. He was that strong. He was that cunning.

And Killua was just that a liar...

The boy was wary of sleeping. Today, he'd proved what they'd always told about him, he proved to be moulded out of what they'd designed, of what they'd predicted, and the way he was handling everything seemed to prove them right- he wasn't meant to have friends, he wasn't meant to have any other life was he? Was he? ... But he still stood vigil, just in case...He refused to take the pills because if he wasn't able to wake up when an attack happened, he would not be able to protect Gon...and he would not forgive himself were the case...

Well, it must have been a heck of a great vigil, because as lost in thought as he was he didn't notice unfamiliar companionship until his shoulder was shaken gently.

Gon stood in front of him. That's why it wasn't unfamiliar...

His sleepy honey eyes stared at him longly. Resigned eyes. His hand extended.

Killua took it. Gon lifted him and tugged him back to their bed.

... Right then Biscuit was landing at the closest airport- miles and miles away. She had her limits. But
the reach of her will to help star apprentices, sometimes, yes sometimes, not even Biscuit was able to fathom.

Chapter End Notes

A/N:

Longest chapter and A/N ever... The xxxx...xxxx are because division lines are unreliable...They appear and disappear at their own volition.

Hello guys :) Im so so thankful for all your reviews...really guys.

As a statement... I have to highlight for you that I... I will still write what I have to write without censorship. I won't- I can't censor myself, the story and its aim is crafted upon this., its leif motiv. My strive is indeed to depict such a devastating experience as abuse is from all the different angles and all the complex issues it entails... One of my major intents is for emotional processes to be understood. The chain-up of construction of layers of meaning is born from the raw dark unspeakable experiences...I wish to portray.

Thanks to all of those who have given me your support. You don't know what it means to me...

Thanks to everyone who answered my poll :) New readers are welcomed to answer it whenever you want. Underages out there do not feel discriminated, I know there are(painful for me) 13 and 14 (and not as painful) 15 and 16 and 17 year olds out there reading but I'm sure that if you stumbled with this subject and have stuck with me its because you can handle what I give you. I hope. I've contacted you all as I could and tried to discourage you of reading me :) I still recommend you to skip whatever you think is inappropriate for you.

On a final note, the song at the beginning is one of my favourites at the moment... What If, by Emilie Autumn. I encourage you to listen to it.

Tell me if you liked this chapter. Next chapter will have the continued sequel of Killua's childhood and a plot twist...

Reply to unsigned Reviewers:

Kai: Thank you for your review! It kind of soothes me really...I'm aware children are exposed to sexual themes from a young age (songs, videos, advertisement, internet etc) but it definitely conflicts me as to how in these media the matter is handled. I hate when rape gets romanticized! Its so UNREAL. Sometimes in real life though child sexual abuse can get romanticized from the child points of view (the abuser never actually sees the child, but the child needs the abuser's love) which doubles the damage... but I did not make Killua's case such (though he does need his brother's approval...). I will explore on the subject though in a future chapter, with other characters...
Oh! about the albino thing. God you are so right. When I first started reading HxH fics, it always bothered me. But as I came to write I realized the difficulty of naming all of the characters when they spoke or acted without repeating their name. The worst is that the group here are all boys. They are all "he"s that get mingled. I hate to end up with lines that sound like "he said to him "he is not doing it for him" and get you all confused about who said what. God...one girl in the group and it'd be MUCH easier...a "she" would suffice for distinction. But as I'm working with the situation given, I have to rely on this epithets to create distinction. I dislike the "silver haired boy" or "white haired boy" epithet because of its length. For Gon we have "raven"and others. I've thought for Killua on the use of "Zoldick" but I dislike it because, is Killua actually a Zoldick? and the semantic burden it carries...If you or any readers out there come out with other epithets for him Ill gladly use them! For now I'm stuck with albino... Well, thank you for your review...thank you for telling me all those nice things... really :) 

Papam and Jagathunder: Thankyou for answering the poll. Hugs to you :)
You can run but you can't-

Run from the pity, from responsibility
Run from the country and run from the city
I can run from the law, I can run from myself
I can run for my life, I can run into debt

I can run from it all, I can run till I'm gone
I can run for the office and run from the cause
I can run using every last ounce of energy

I cannot, I cannot, I cannot
-Run from my family
They're hiding inside of me, corpses on ice
Come in if you'd like but just don't tell my family
They'd never forgive me, they'll say that I'm crazy
But they would say anything if it would

Shut me up…

-"Runs in the family", by Amanda Palmer

The next day after Illumi had saved his life- the next day he'd...he'd... he'd done that...scene... he'd woken up under the bed. Even though Nanny had stayed with him until he'd fallen asleep. He'd woken in the middle of the night. And just hid under -his mind resembled the bent frame of a broken bicycle reeling-reeling-reeling How stupid-how stupid he'd been! stupid-stupid-idiot-idiot-

Then the grand central clock five floors below struck four am. He jumped startled. Each toll seem to claim, yes claim him back to his nightmare-the rushing visions- for in his dream- oh it rang, rang, rang, rang –in his dream he hadn't only leaned and kissed Him, no. In the dream he had-he had-he'd- he blocked it- his eyes seeking desperately the darkness, his small extended hands clawing the floor-the chimes drilling the image to his mind - as he'd-he'd- done the other things – other things-the images ripped in the crevice of each shadow and mother shrieked and shrieked – and vases crushed and crushed-and he wasn't able, wasn't allowed to stop- even though the shrieks augmented-helplessness-His hands flew to his ears-he wasn't able and he'd done other things- Him observing, devouring him with the dark -dark eyes-

The silence abruptly rushed in.

He felt cold. It was all too dark… all too silent.

He stared into space. For endless hours.

Suspended.
The night shadows crept into the faint hues of dawn. Until the sun rose. Maybe he'd slept against the floor boards. Maybe he hadn't - he couldn't recall any other timings of the clock... The only thing present was the same shame that had awoken him and that hadn't left him since. It itched up his chest till it stung his eyes. He didn't want to see anyone. He knew Nanny was out today, it was her free day. So no one would care...

As hours now lined the walls, slowly he'd gone out from under his bed. He observed his room for entire minutes… He felt exposed. *They all knew.* He brought all the important items back under again- stuff like his game boy and pillows and legos and hidden snacks.

But time kept going by and he skipped breakfast, he skipped lunch, and he felt hunger, he felt thirst… And he began to feel anger.

*Anger.* He was prepared for hunger and thirst, but not the anger. Nanny said it wasn't his fault. But he'd still been punished, mommy had slapped him and the sense of injustice seemed to taint him- He saw his own toys torn to pieces-they would never protect him again- never-never-never.

*But he deserved it-*

No- it wasn't his fault! And he felt like tearing them all over again.

He'd vowed not to leave his under bed the entire day.

He'd vowed- He'd vowed-He'd vowed-

*He thought detached.*

Because, as he thought back, now that it was night again, his feet dangling from a city roof, he thought coldly on how he should have abided to this vow.

But then again, that morning he had not a single possibility of knowing that yesterday's moment of grace wasn't the worse he could display. He sat observing from his height the city… He hadn't had a chance to know- to predict-that he'd end up the entire evening hiding in the midst of this vast metropolis.

He was deep into trouble. Deep, ankle, knee, waist and neck-deep into trouble.

*He should not have left his underbed-* he couldn't help the silent chastise again and again.

In so much trouble he was, that seven-year old him had run away. And he couldn't return. *Not for now.* He just couldn't.

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*Leorio's stride was silent through the halls. As always (or surely quite often) he wore a spotless suit. As if the ironed shirt and jacket would somehow straighten their messed up lives. But he eased his thoughts when finally, in one of the many common area rooms – in one of the endless sequence of made- to- be living-rooms with couches and futon and center tables the hostel provided for leisure-Leorio found him.*

*Kurapica lied stretched in a sofa, eyes closed and a hand holding an icepack to his head. This, you could guess, was amusing to say the least. But Leorio wouldn't voice out the comment for sure. The blonde had probably chosen this place, far from the rooms and kitchen, to be isolated for sure. He'd chosen well, but this wasn't surprising, Kurapica seldom lacked in taste. This particular room had a*
large window, one that gave a pallid hue to the walls and brought out the vermilion of the copycat-Persian carpet. You could see outside the snow slowly descending.

Despite the portrayal of tranquillity, Kurapica's brow furrowed the moment Leorio silently crossed the threshold- as expected he wasn't welcomed.

The doctor exhaled as he approached the youth resigned "I won't disturb you. I just thought that this might be more effective than the ice".

Leorio still couldn't help the half-a-grin to his voice.

Through golden lashes Kurapica saw the extended hand holding the glass of water and a pill. Probably Advil or something similar, he thought with distaste. It was one of the things that had mystified him when he was but a boy and had to enter the world of hegemonic civilization for good. There was a bloody pill for everything nowadays

Kurapica took it mumbling dry thanks. He fell back against the couch. But seconds went by and Leorio did not move, causing one of his fair eyebrows to rise evidently vexed.

The doctor exhaled "Kurapica, I'm expecting a call from another doctor concerning Killua and I'm nervous. This is why my aim for today is figuring out that and reading the newspaper. I want silent company for this. However if you'd rather be alone I'll go find the boys, or just set myself in another room..." he trailed. Then the doctor gave him objectively a long time to reply.

As the evident silence elapsed, he just turned and waved a half-hearted 'call if you need anything'.

Kurapica's grumble stopped him fairly beyond the threshold.

"Leorio"

Oh his tone was derogatory for voice was hoarse. Still hoarse. The image of the wet cheek against his shoulder flashed, but the cold blue eyes brought him back.

"Leorio, stay..." a sigh of cold, yes, arctic-cold annoyance and disdain.

"What?" the doctor tried to reconcile his gaze and the message.

"Stay. Are you deaf? The boy's aren't silent company anyway..." his voice drained. As if he'd lost an inner chessboard dialogue. "Just..." he seemed to have difficulty in choosing his words "just... keep your behavior on check. I'm not in the temper to be toyed around"

Leorio felt compelled to reply, but measured himself as he came back in the room. Sincerely he did not know with what propriety Kurapica could protest to that cause.

...Oh well...over the years they'd figured out well the lines of their interaction. When Leorio was being an idiot Kurapica put up with him reasonably well-taking his uproars quite collected. When reversed, he corresponded fairly as well, so they had an understanding. Being honest though... Leorio sighed. There was a considerable nevertheless not to be overlooked: when matters involved the called life quest...well Kurapica could turn so, so, so very.... Let's say moody. Yes, let's say... idiotic-piece of douche bag moron jerk.

God knows it hadn't been a good idea to mix yesterday's enlightenment about Killua's situation with one of their occasional night slips -which his friend always seemed quite eager to forget. Leorio knew that right now anyone's presence – particularly his own-was not wanted.
Of course he knew this was mostly about what they'd learned from Killua…His own self couldn't aspire to such a place of prominence in Kurapica's mind by comparison; he knew this rather well and did not seek it. He was aware as well that his hangover didn't help.

And that yesterday had been hard on them both.

So you'd ask why hadn't he avoided the reactive unpredictable blonde? Because all signs were neon blinking quite clearly: Danger! Danger! Danger!

Well, the answer in truth was out of bloody graced boredom. You see Kurapica's guilt-anger tide usually bit ferociously. It came compressed in witty-laser-harsh comments… they could get oh so hurtful. Leorio though, had learned to find them amusing.

The doctor sat, trying to settle without making noise. He was still intending to avoid as much of interaction as possible-he indeed only sought company. But as if answering with an unintentionally spontaneous example, Kurapica mocked Leorio's silence "Well, if you're expecting something, I beg my pardons in advance if my manners aren't those of an English earl towards his host" he waved his hand with eyes closed. He cleared his throat… "But you might deduce the despise I feel against myself and my head right now, and Leorio, note I'm aware you find my misery amusing. Well it only is for you, so I'm warning, keep your mouth shut"

"I haven't even spoken" he looked at the blond with a forced smile lifting his hands.

After some seconds though Leorio exhaled "But you're not going to get bullied if that's what you mean." He examined again his blonde friend with concern "You should hydrate yourself though - take water- because alcohol-"

"And he's speaking. Ironic. I know how to take care of myself Leorio-thanks" the last dropped in tone to a whip-edged whisper.

The doctor doubted the truth of the words, but he wasn't about to judge. The four of them had serious self management problems. And he knew Kurapica didn't mind actually the jokes. He was rather avoiding any sign of sympathy- the pitying stares-he abhorred it. And as much as it was against the doctor's nature, he would indulge today in what Kurapica needed.

He adamantly opened his case and took out a newspaper. And he proceeded quietly with his own life.

At a moment Kurapica incorporated slowly, muttering under his breath "where is it….Agh," and it couldn't but draw his attention. The blonde snarled and winced at his own motion, a hand to his head. He vaguely mumbled "must have left it in the room-…” he accompanied his words with a hand patting the sofa in sluggish search, trying to go unnoticed.

"Which book was it Kurapica?"

"Uh? Really? We're still talking"

"I beg your pardon then"

Kurapica rolled his eyes. "The title's 'Hundred years of solitude' " he replied tired leaning on his back again.

With eyes closed he heard the lack of comment on Leorio's part. And heard his own reply in delay. Awesome.
"Yeah yeah ironic title ha ha- let's mock the loneliest guy-" He snapped but then Kurapika felt a soft weight in his chest. He opened his eyes to the brown leather book.

"It was lying over the bed. I thought you might want to read it" Leorio had comfortably seated on a couch again, and opened the newspaper avoiding eye contact.

Kurapica was left in silence.

…

Not an amiable one.

"Thanks Leorio" He finally spoke curtly. "How thoughtful of you." It was almost sarcastic. Leorio had to remember he wasn't always this size of a jerk. "But I was just mumbling to myself incoherent stuff most assuredly, for I can't read. The icepack is numbing my hand not out of masochism, and reading would surely ensue something alike. I don't even know why I'm explaining" the last was said in a mutter.

"Oh, sorry then" Leorio replied curtly.

The doctor turned again to his paper. But a second later he turned as if with an inspiration "wait… Kurapica, you know, I read that book. In what part are you? Maybe I could read it aloud for you"

"UGH!" Kurapica's snarled under his breath, his hand hiding his eyes with the icepack's aid.

"What's wrong. Me speaking?" Leorio now spoke in the verge of loosing patience.

Silence

"Kurapica…"

"Not you speaking. It's you"

"Me? what"

"You are what's wrong" his jaw clenched.

Leorio adopted an expression that read "seriously", quizzical stare. Kurapica, under the icepack, rolled his eyes again.

"…Maybe you should go"

"Ok then" Leorio stood up defiant.

"Damn! For goodness sake what do you want Leorio?!" Kurapica let out fiercely "You bring me a glass of water, you bring a pill; you pop out the book I'm reading out of nothing- what a marvellous coincidence! You even offer to read it out loud for me, god, how generous, Well-what -do -you – want!" Kurapica's voice rose "ah?! We are NOT discussing yesterday-that's it, we're NOT, I've already too much in my mind I shouldn't even be explaining to you and you know that by now I'd be storming out of the room but I can't and that's low of you Leorio-"

"Whoa-whoa STOP!" silence "Geez! You speak a lot for a guy with a hangover"

Leorio had one eyebrow raised

"Kurapica, I know you don't like to speak about it, we don't have to, and we won't-non-existent- I
wasn't even planning to bring up the topic. I brought you stuff because that's who I am and I came here to read my newspaper because I'm bored." he slid the glasses up the bridge of his nose "So be at ease. Straining to raise your voice is hurting you more than me. I know you have lots in your mind- I remind you we both." He eyed the blond. "Now" he announced "I'm leaving you, us, at peace. I'm reading"

The doctor reclined his back against the sofa and placed his feet over the table as he held the newspaper untroubled.

Kurapica had been effectively silenced for long seconds.

Well he felt slightly guilty. He knew Kurapica would be like this, it hadn't been his intention to bother the guy. He just had involuntarily lit the match.

"Leorio"

"Mmm?"

There was a silence again. Followed by a sigh.

"…really" Kurapica's voice was skeptic. "You don't-".

"Yes, Kurapica. I don't. Just rest"

Kurapica remained silent, the icepack to his head.

"I guess... I should apologize then" he replied annoyed.

"Don't. Hangover sensitivity, I'm fine with it"

Kurapica would have glared but just massaged his temples. He tried to concentrate on the cold against his forehead and not on the dizzying thoughts.

A considerate amount of time after, when Leorio had turned to the sixth page of his newspaper, a silkier, weaker version of the blonde's voice reached him.

"Leorio…if…if all you said, well if that's the case…" he cleared his throat "well if so, uhm, then, if you read aloud the book… it would be fine I guess." He paused "If you want to of course, I'm not begging".

Leorio chuckled. Knowing, of course this only irritated the blonde more. He must have been really bored. He took his time to finish the paragraph he'd been reading, before he set the newspaper aside.

Kurapica felt the book's weight off his lap

"In which part more or less-"

"Page 134" Kurapica said with precision. oh, his sleek memory sounded so arrogant – quite more with his entire precedent attitude – and he felt compelled to add furtively "if I'm not mistaken…"

He wasn't of course. He never was.

And Leorio began to read.
It was noon and Killua put down the book he'd been reading. He knew he rebelled against the thought of coming out from under his bed. But he couldn't avoid it, as much as he wanted to stay. Time for training arrived. And training was something not to be skipped. Never. Ever. He was expected at the dungeons. And at the dungeons he would present himself as always.

He inhaled.

The boy decided to act as if nothing. He repeated this: act as if nothing. He settled all emotions down. He proceeded to hide his broken toys in a box. He dressed—finally—and readied himself… he combed with his hands the unruly strands of hair avoiding his look in the mirror. He finally opened the door, took a step outside, and left.

He couldn't help replaying all—as he walked dutifully to Zeno's training, his mind was relentless. Deeper and deeper into the maws of the earth while it didn't cease the Tommy gun fire of thoughts. All of his mother's words—her shriek—her shriek—her shriek—And then Nanny's voice: it was not your fault. Killua—she had said firmly—not your fault—.

He jumped startled. As if summoned from inside out his mind, he'd stumbled face to face with the flounciness. Kikyou startled looked down. And she proceeded to hold her chin high and regard the boy with indifference. Something she seldom did. He felt the pang as if a slap. Immediate shame.

"Son, you did not present yourself to lunch—" But the boy had backed away at her hand.

"Killua! It's rude not to salute your mother!" Her pitch rose.

"It wasn't my fault!"

"What?!"

"Yesterday!" he yelled, almost stuttering "You slapped me but it wasn't my fault! You know it wasn't!" he yelled. There was a second of silence, as he stared at her. She looked startled. He felt about to panic and so he ran shoving her aside.

He ran and ran. Waiting for her shriek.

It never came. She had only turned stunned.

Bang. As if he'd been shot. That's how it felt, her silence only confirmed it and his guts cringed, she hadn't shrieked, she hadn't yelled, she hadn't answered. Nanny had been right. It hadn't been his fault.

The injustice crawled in raging leaps at his chest.

...But he had been wrong because he'd confused everything… the realms of action—the realms of action—He slowly decreased his running strides until halting altogether. He felt shame. He didn't want to see anyone. It wasn't his fault supposedly, but he still felt shame—he still felt shame. Go salute your brother. He'd inclined. And swiftly he decided he wouldn't go training—grandpa had been there...

He'd never, ever skipped training.

...

At the moment of holding all to the light, he guessed that had been the first of his wrongdoings. Missing training.
But then no... *The kiss was...*

No... *his assignment gone wrong, when Illumi saved him- that one was-* his mind wouldn't stop the broken- bicycle-reeling-

"Hey kid, are you lost?" A sweet elderly woman had approached him in the street. But she stumbled with the emptiness of the child's dead stare. It chilled her to the bone. And somehow the lack of life in them awoke in her despair "Kid"- but he'd turned and walked off.

He hadn't even heard. He just walked away from people who came too near his way- but it all still rose in his mind- for skipping training wasn't even the greater reason of his problems.

---

Gon was restless. Curled at the back of the door where Leorio had made his entrance, the boy hid. Absent-minded, his hands played with his boot laces. Killua slept and slept, and he was bored to death. However he was sensibly trying, with all his might, to avoid being a nuisance for the guys again. Eavesdropping was fun enough anyway. He even tried to memorize the comical conversation. And as Leorio began to read aloud Gon contended on closing his eyes to listen as well.

They were in the middle of a pretty fun chapter about a girl rising to the heavens and ghosts when Leorio abruptly stopped his lecture. Gon opened his eyes curious and looked through the crevice unwary, and almost jumped out of his skin. At the opposite end of the room stood Killua- his image as pale and sudden as if an apparition. He wore his pyjamas, his eyes fixed on the doctor.

"Killua!" Leorio let out in delayed surprise.

"You...drugged...me" the boy muttered, his voice hollow.

"What? Killua were you sleeping?" he asked

"You drugged me..." he just repeated directly to Leorio with cold eyes. It would have been menacing... wasn't his hair all ruffled, his clothings bed-mangled and his eyes sleepy.

"What are you saying kid? You mean the pills I handed over to you?"

Killua stared dead on.

"Ok... Let's see, at what time you took them?"

"I didn't take 'em...don't feign this! - You drugged-" but he yawned, his shoulders slopping. He rubbed his eyes with the back of his hand.

"you know I didn't take them. You drugged me"

"Ok, this doesn't make sense. I didn't Killu, I gave you the pillbox" Leorio spoke with patience

"Yes! But you..."Killua shook his head aggressively. "Liar. You liar. You..." He let his own line echo hollow... and his eyes suddenly closed in distress at the word- and that set Gon into motion. He slowly incorporated from his place... and hesitantly appeared at the doorway.

"Killua, come here, let's not bother the guys-"

Leorio jumped startled "WOW!" This time he'd almost had kittens. He cursed loudly "whoa-stop it
guys! You appear like ghosts out of nowhere! Aren't there any other guests in this hostel anyway? GEEZ!

"It's The Shining. And Killua is evil-possessed by this hostel" Kurapica chuckled. He immediately winced. His intervention however had generated laughs in the room except for the one mentioned. But Kurapica smiled "No… actually it's the season. No one comes here with this snowstorms-that's why the committee…." He paused "But I'm interested... Gon, since when were you hidden?"

Kurapica did not turn to face the smallest of the group. But he could sense him fidgeting.

"I came looking for Killua… come Killua" he sought his ghostly pale friend with a warning glance, but Killua missed it. He seemed lost, staring at Leorio's newspaper with a zombie stupor.

"Killua-

"He …drugged me" the boy muttered wearily.

"I didn't!" Leorio claimed.

"Killu come…” Gon intervened

"He drugged me" the boy shook his head, as if to help himself wake up.

Gon hesitated and bit his lip.

"Killu…it wasn't him…it was me… yesterday" He giggled nervously as he scratched his nape "… I…I found you awake in the floor and brought you to bed. Then hours passed and I found you yet again in the floor and I wanted to kill you by then so I gave you water when you said you were thirsty and I... well…they were right there on the night table and they're so small and grindable you know...you didn't even notice…"

Killua's eyes dawned in understanding. "You…"

Gon nodded, avoiding his eyes.

"You! You…bloody…piece of…what's wrong with me!" he barely let out in chastise "I didn't even-"

"How much you gave him?!” Leorio stood alarmed

"One? I thought one, because…one-" Gon's eyes immediately sought the doctor

"Damn…we were supposed to scale slowly he had to take one-fourth of one and… At what time you gave him the pills Gon?"

"I-I-I'm sorry!" Gon's eyes by now were wide in fear-he'd poisoned his friend?! They'd been here before! And Killua was stuck to the honeyed alarm gaze like in trance.

"I'm sorry! I didn't know! I thought-"

"It's ok, just tell me an approximate time" Leorio sighed

"Er… er… early? Like five? I don't know!"

"I'm sure the tag says "don't leave at children's reach" Kurapica commented with a wry smile
"We're NOT! I just didn't know and-"

Leorio interrupted Gon "By Nen the pills last twelve hours so... you should be sleeping Killua" he calculated "Hell, so I keep messing with the dosage! you're awake"

"You should e-mail my family then" Killua murmured as if tuning again into the conversation.

Silence

"Really?" the doctor said with hope -they might know about Killua's training in poisons and-

He stumbled with three accusatory looks including the violet one that snapped

"Seriously. You're that desperate"

"You're right, oh god, I'm sorry" Leorio took a hand to his head, embarrassed.

"Sorry? About what" Killua's eyes were cold. He yawned turning his head towards Gon "you drugged me... You are so paying... paying this..." he mumbled the rest as Gon crossed the room to take him away "sorry guys! We're not going to bother you again-" he tried to take Killua who just lazily wrestled against the motion-which was quite a lot still..

"Gon... you were hearing the chapter, weren't you?" Kurapica eyed him raising the icepack from his head.

The guilty honey eyes rose as he tried to restrain Killua's fighting- which was dying down again into zombie mode. His mouth was agape but speech forbidden.

"What if you just stay? let that one in the couch, he won't notice" Kurapica waved

"I...heard that" Killua mumbled. But he did not face Kurapica.

He had made a decision. He was just too sleepy to...comply with it...now...and so in the meantime he wouldn't face... you see, sleepy it did make sense. But he wouldn't face the blonde until he did... until he set things right. He'd had so much time last night to think before-

Hands on his shoulders- Gon's- and he found himself in the same sofa as Kurapica, facing him from the opposite side. As it was a big long couch, they both fitted stretched quite well. Even though there were other seats on the room, Gon proceeded to plop on the floor by Killua's side.

"You're still going to...pay for this" Killua curled to one side to face Gon through mid lids.

"Shhhhh.... Keep telling yourself that" Gon whispered

Killua bit his lip. He felt drowsy and hated being unable to control his body-hate "go fuck.... yourself...and... and eat shit ...you Freecs... I trusted- you I -...you idiot..." his words were quite aggressive for the slurred mumble sustaining them. His lids were dropping.

Gon looked at Leorio, and took a finger to his neck doing a slicing gesture. The doctor sniggered.

"Enough. Leorio continue, I want to know what happens" Kurapica snapped annoyed. The doctor smiled. He liked this; all together...it was almost cozy, each in their own inanity...

He proceeded to continue the reading.

Gon soon was listening intently. He didn't even realize he was wriggling the fraying threads of
Killua's left sleeve. Killua, curled and facing Gon, couldn't make sense of the words read…But he liked that… He watched the tanned hands… his hand-the fraying string- his sleeve…and he would, he would tell, he would tell them the situation, the safe summary, he would…

He would.

He would…

"CAUGHT YA! Don't try to hide Killu! I know you're running away from practice" his piggy eyes squinted in malice. Killua had tried to conceal inside his hoodie and climb the stairs quickly past the fat boy. But his arm was taken

"you are running from practice! Yei! I'm so lucky! I'm soo telling mom!" Milluki cooed excited.

Killua shoved his arm away and continued heading up but his sibling followed him as a taunting shadow "Is it a practice with Brother again? I know why you're not going"

Killu's involuntarily froze. Milluki jeered "I know why! I know why! I know why!"

"Shut up" he tried to get past him...his voice sounded so small…

"You don't know what this means!" he relished "Finally they all know Killua! Now they've all seen the cry-baby-GIRL you are! Killua-is GIRL- KILLUA IS A GIRL" He ridiculed stepping right in front of him.

The small hands fisted but he didn't look up "I'm not!"

"You are!"

"No!"

"Yes! Yes! Yes!"

"No!"

There was nothing wrong with being a girl he thought, but he wasn't one! He was a boy! And he wasn't a crybaby! He wasn't!

"But you are! You are the hugest whimpering-GIRL in the world and they know it! Like, prove me how it's a lie!" he giggled and his disgusting voice lowered "I saw what you did yesterday. We all did"

Furious Killua shoved him with anger and headed stairs up again. The bigger boy caught him by his torso and tried to aim for a wedgie as he sniggered on how he probably didn't have a dinky down there because he was a girl-But a blow to his ribs cut him short

"OW! WHY YOU DID THAT FOR!" at the corner of Milluki's eyes greasy tears gathered in feigned innocence. It was an unspoken rule not to use what was learnt in practice in their petty fights. But as they grew it was getting more and more difficult…

"I HIT YOU BECAUSE YOU'RE... BULLYING ME! I'm telling mom you are!" Killua tried to use the same card the elder had. He'd even picked up the word somewhere online.
"And what are you telling mom eh? Because all I said Killua is TRUE" He yelled "Only girls kiss boys, they all know that and you-" But a sudden snigger interrupted his speech "You..." almost with incredulity "you from all kissed –kissed Brother!" He blurted in roaring in laughter.

He felt the color rising in his cheek, his mouth dry as he realized he'd launched forward. He found himself punching Milluki like a training sack. But this one raised his voice

"OOOHHH THE KISser BOY IS MAD! WELL I HAVE A PHOTOGRAPH OF YOUR KISS AND I'LL PUT IT ON THE INTERNET!"

"YOU DON'T!"

"I DO!"

"YOU LIAR FAT COW!"

Milluki eyes darkened and his hand suddenly clasped Killua's neck. His sibling had begun choking him.

"What did you say?"

Killua pushed him with his foot away. Younger he was, but he still was stronger. Milluki fell to the ground

“That you are a FAT COW and a LIAR” seven and he felt the satisfaction to look down at his elder brother.

Milluki slowly stood up and rose in front of Killua and the moment was gone. The older child was still taller "Well." his voice sharpened "Then I'm telling mom you did it again, that you tried to kiss me." He looked down at Killua.

"And she will believe it little brother. You know why? Because you're a fag" He spat. He actually spat. And the spit landed on his cheek.

Killua slowly cleaned the trail with the sleeve of his hoodie, clenching his jaw. But he'd hesitated and instant- he didn't know the word- and that was fatal.

"You don't know what fag means" the corner of Milluki's mouth swiftly lifted

"I do!"

"You don't" He spoke with certainty "ah this is, this is so hilarious! It means, oh god it means" a horrible blurt of laughter interrupted him "oh damn it! How come you don't know if you have already done it?!You've –wow-oh wow god even grandpapa and Father saw you!They did -" his laughter roared.

"SHUT UP!"

"Oh damn, you're a fag little brother! Who would have known! You kissed a man little like a, like bitch! And you kissed Brother! YOU!"

"SHUT UP!"- His hand flew to cover Milluki's mouth but he pushed him away guffawing and they were wrestling as Milluki roared in laughter

"AND –AND-AND"
"STOP IT!"

"AND THEY ALL SAW KILLUA! THE PERFECT KILLUA! YOU SHOULD HAVE LOOKED AT THEIR FACES! YOU KISSED A MAN –YOU WENT AND-"

"HE TAUGHT ME HOW!"

Milluki’s laughter caught on his mouth. For the first time he looked puzzled

"Uh?"

Killua’s eyes widened. In terror. And in an instant he shoved Milluki with all his strength stairs down. Not even knowing what he was doing.

Milluki screamed.

In slow motion he watched Milluki roll down like a beer barrel. His layer of fat seemed to protect him from each hard blow- but he rolled and rolled against the hard stone and Killua saw blood stunned. At a given moment Milluki himself was able to halt the rolling messily by clinging to the banister. But he barely stood, like an awkward potato sac. Real tears streamed down his cheeks. His disoriented look stumbled with his elbow scraped and bloodied and he shrieked at the sight. And he hadn't noticed his lip and brow were also bleeding. He raised his eyes to meet Killua's with disbelief.

"you" he squealed

"I'm sorry-I'm sorry Milluki" he tried desperate-But it was too late.

"MOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOM!"

Killua felt a pang of fear

"I didn't mean-"

"MOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOM! KILLUA TRIED IT AGAIN! HE KISSED ME, AND THEN-AND THEN HE SHOVED ME DOWN THE STAIRS! "

His hollering boomed throughout the walls, down and up the vacant halls.

Killua incorporated with a start, his heart running.

No one was speaking as if the guys were all staring at something.

_He must have fallen asleep because he'd reached awareness at the lack of Leorio's voice-_ he looked around in panic. The room had darkened, at least an hour had gone by, and his heart beat so loudly against his chest-

But he immediately understood the reason of the silence. The guys were staring at the door agape. And at the door, a silent silhouette smiled at them.

"BISCUIT!" Gon exclaimed loudly.

Biscuit…
One of her gloved hands was posed over the frame of the door. Her gem like eyes observed them, her other hand holding a white porcelain kettle

"A cup of tea anyone?"

Gon had jumped at his outburst and ran to meet her- and in a second she held the kettle high not wanting to spill its contents.

Killua did not understand the reason of her abrupt presence. He still felt disoriented. But he noticed her image settled his chest. Relief, he identified. He felt the sudden rush of relief. He seemed to be able to breathe. As if he hadn't breathed for weeks. Wow, he realized there'd been an invisible weight, harshly embedded to his chest, but as he stood it somehow dissolved. Biscuit was strong. They were safe in truth. ...and he, the one in front, he was safe as well...

She would help him...He breathed in... he'd needed that so,so much. He found himself smiling.

Biscuit had actually arrived ten minutes earlier than that first greeting. But well, the four of them assembled to the half-light, the snow steadily falling by the window behind… the image was worth taking her time to appreciate.

She was growing softer with the years, maybe.

And she was a closeted voyeur. She liked observing people.

And oh did she observe.

Run! Run! Run! Killua! Run! Run! Run! The only possible direction- upstairs run!

Past his own bedroom run! - They would probably look for him there-run-damn it-run! Past the other flats and bedrooms and floors, run! panic seizing him run! he didn't know where he was heading run! He was getting higher, and up there only one room - and in a fit of inspiration he ran to Milluki's floor Run! Run!-They wouldn't look for him there-not at first-

And so he broke in with a slam of the door.

He ran and he felt anger and sorrow, he heard the voices two flights down, Milluki's yells echoed as the video games figurines came into view- and with all his might he kicked the shelves. The support collapsed, the thousand figurines breaking as they rained down. Some were porcelain, some were plastic and elastic but he did not care as he found himself tearing them apart.

"I HATE YOU MILLUKI I HATE YOU I HATE YOU!" Rage as he had never felt tore his body and it hurt as he felt the want to kill, to kill- he didn't even know if it was actually kill-he didn't know if it was against Milluki even, but he'd kill-he'd kill to shut all out-he'd kill to shut them down, the screams, and he hated Him- he hated!-no he hadn't thought that-wrong- yet he would kill to make them die, because they made him do things he didn't want, because they said lies lies lies lies, because he felt sick, because he was tired of training and hiding and running and running and it wasn't his fault! IT WASN'T HIS FAULT! IT'S NOT MY FAULT! His claws had shoved down Milluki's computer, down, die! Die! DIE! IT WASN'T HIS-.

As the processor fell and crashed he suddenly stopped.

He slowly took in his surroundings, off his frenzied mode.
The room was a wreck

His own wreck.

He heard the screaming downstairs… He tried to take it in. He'd destroyed all the figurines. He'd taken of their arms and legs and heads in harried seconds. They all lay at his feet. At his feet… As the bunch of dead corpses sometimes did at his Brothers' feet- all piled up, these legs, these arms-

He suddenly realized what he'd done. He'd even broken the computer. As a strong tidal wave-he felt to his knees, he was going to cry, but boys didn't and why was he so angry? Milluki only hated him because he'd broken his cat's tail, it was only fair if he hated his smaller brother-I'm sorry-I'm sorry-why-it wasn't his fault – NO, it was his fault, it was, it always was , always his fault-it was, I'm sorry- I'm sorry-and-

*They would punish him.* They would punish him severely and they had the right but-but-and he would be taken to- he would be taken-to-Brother to punish him and his guts twisted. He felt dread, he couldn't word it but he felt a piercing dread but he deserved it, I'm sorry, I'm sorry he whispered again and again, as he began on his knees to gather the figurines but it was useless-why-why -he'd always acted good! He'd never done anything, anything to make them angry! Never! He'd...

*He'd even thought he was making them proud...*

And then came the sequence- he remembered the kiss, he had leaned against Illumi in front of everybody-kiss -lips- and the other images surfaced- he closed his eyes shutting down-shame shame shame-swallow- a tissue to clean his lips and his cheek, –shut down- Milluki's spit- the dark eyes-he pulled himself into a tight ball under the desk breathing loudly, potato chip bags surrounding him, his eyes closed tight.

Footsteps.

Footsteps running up the stairs.

As a trigger his operative mind activated.

He was suddenly hanging from Milluki's window-*Run!*- He swiftly skidded from windowsill to windowsill. As he took in the height he defied, he wondered… *he wondered for the first time in his life* but he ran, he reached the grounds, he reached the gardens. He ran and ran through the huge expanse, not halting one second, even though the forests were huge and treacherous, not once stopping to rest, even though he ran for one hour to reach the gates, not even as Kanaria's call reached him, not after he opened the first door, not after he ran the long paths, the winding paths, not after he reached a city, until he'd run kilometers and kilometers away, not until then did he stop...

...

...When he did he only breathed loudly out of the run. He'd been running for two hours or so. His hands were on his knees as he caught his breath.

He felt numb.

His shoes and knees were dirty. The road beat on the sole of his feet.

He incorporated, looking around. With calculating cold eyes.

He felt numb indeed.
So …So they would punish him… Big deal he thought removed. He'd taken all the punishments and
tortures they had prepared for him when he'd been a good boy. Big deal. Days would come and go
as days had come and gone. But he wouldn't make the same mistake again; he'd learned his lesson,
end of the story. Milluki would have his laugh and would make fun of him. He would let him, it was
his fault and he'd done wrong. And then it would not matter. He would not mix realms. He would do
as he was told. He would not care to feel again, he decided. He even felt loathing to his own
weakness. Brother wouldn't have reacted this way. He'd allowed himself to feel fear, something
despicable to his eyes. Now he wouldn't, it was that simple. He would behave, they would forget.

But…

He just couldn't return… not yet.

He set his operative mind in motion.

The next assignment scheduled was today, at midnight. It was supposedly dangerous, and
supposedly it had to be achieved on his own-a challenge specific for the Zoldick boy. After his
embarrassing scene, and after failing his assignment yesterday, after skipping training and…all the
rest… he wasn't sure this particular assignment still counted. But no, it would count. He would make
it count. He would.

It was in this city... he just had to wait some hours and prove them he could do it right. He would not
return until he did, to prove them he could be useful again, he could be good. Until then, he could
just wonder off, down the streets and shops, he'd been always well on his own and he knew they
wouldn't go to the city, they would not imagine, their house was so huge, there were so many cities
and directions…

And like this, you know, maybe… maybe they would... forgive him...


Killua realized Biscuit eyes were posed on him on close examination. He shrugged this off returned a
smartass smile. Just then Leorio jumped unexpected

"You must be the beautiful trainee the guys always spoke of!" The doctor stood to salute,
straightening his jacket with his hands in earnest. Then in his swift long strides, he was by her side,
taking of her snow dusted coat, "Let me help you ¿So Biscuit is your name?" he adopted a classy
deep voice.

"It is" she eased her coat off with a seductive smile. Gon wrinkled his nose but Leorio seemed
delighted.

"You are lovelier than what I'd imagined" he murmured taking the kettle off her hands with
politeness "so why such a damsel of world renown like you would cross the globe to visit these
two… ticks?"

She posed her gloved hand over her lips to hide a chuckle "oh, I am wondering the same thing
myself"

Kurapica felt bile up his throat. He wasn't sure if it was part of the hangover or sheer disgust. The
worse was that Leorio wasn't even acting. But he sighed- he had manners. Unwillingly he
incorporated, giving a nodding gesture and a polite hello.

"You must be Kurapica" Biscuit looked at the blonde tilting her head with interest, and then regarded
Leorio again "So you are 'the guys'!"

"They are!" Gon claimed fondly.

Killua whistled looking her up and down "Leorio's right, you didn't come out of mild interest" a cheeky tone that made the rest look up "so why are you here old hag?"

"Killua!"

Everyone scolded him and Biscuit eyes flashed in vexation for a fraction of a second, gesture only caught by the small Zoldick. *The punk* - Killua's smirk kept the truth right at the edge of his teeth, grinning as everyone berated him, his stance defying. Kurapica had kept quite. The boy seemed...more at peace than any other moment of the last couple of weeks.

Biscuit gazed at him interlacing her fingers under her chin looking cute and adorable to everyone else. For Gon and Killua that was her viper killer stare.

"How is your cheek Killua dear?" the sweetest of tones "I know that punch must have left long-term consequences, didn't it? My poor boy" she pouted with lovely small full lips "poor poor boy, I'm so sorry! I think I cracked two Zoldick molars, if I'm not mistaken?"

"Your small hand has a beautiful punch." He said as if speaking of an old friend. "But I was just innocently wondering you know- the famous Biscuit Krueger wouldn't cross the world for ticks like us would she? why someone so famous, petite, *young* and adorable like you" he gestured with grandiosity "would visit us, unless the world was under impending doom or that she had a plan… Because if we're honest, you surely must have other males scattered round the globe that would give you far more personal leisure, don't you think?"

"KILLUA!" Leorio, who had been checking his cell phone in vain, shot him a look of disbelief. He was about to apologize for the boy but Biscuit's chuckle interrupted him "Oh, but he's not mistaken" she blushed calculatedly. Then she looked straight on to his student "You've grown Killua. Probably an inch taller". She looked at Gon standing at his side "and you too, Gon"

And then Biscuit raised a finger.

The room fell in an incomprehensible suspension. And abruptly Killua and Gon jumped.

"SEVEN!"

"I said it first" Killu immediately snapped his head at Gon.

"NO! We said it together!" Gon hands fisted

"No"

"Yes!" Leorio and Kurapica by now were exchanging mystified looks

"No-o, I was first Freecs"

"Not true! Right Biscuit?"

"He said it first for a millisecond" Biscuit grinned.

Gon was disappointed "really? Biscuit do it again! Do it again-"

"Not for now dear" She turned to the white-haired boy "I was expecting to put you into push-
ups...Well... Killua Zoldick, you are most unkind to treat me this way if you both summoned me in the first place" she raised a fine eyebrow.

Killua's eyes flashed in confusion. Gon turned to his friend swiftly "Killua, she's here because I called her when you asked me to, remember?"

Killua was stunned by the information "you called her?"

"Skype"

Killua concentrated... "when was that...? Oh... you told me.... Riiight. But that was... ages ago... and ... I didn't think you would come...you said." he stutted.

"Well I did" she spoke bright "I came as fast as my agenda let me. I'll always be free for my dazzling students" she clasped her hands.

"Mmm" Killua observed her " That's not the entire reason. You said it. Liars know liars best" Killua crossed his arms

Biscuit rolled her eyes "Ok, Goodness, if you want an excuse so desperately I may add, that well, I also came to settle other matters with you" her eyes sparkled like gems. But she added quickly" but my priority was helping you boys"

"Aaah... there it is" Killua pointed " I didn't think you would come out of pure selflessness"

"Hey!" This time Biscuit cheeks blushed in real vexation "didn't I taught you both out of pure selflessness? You were meat for vultures in the state you were inside that game!"

"They were?" Leorio interjected

"Great. So it isn't recent. Their always on the verge of dying it seems" Kurapica muttered

"You taught us so we could win Greed Island game together" Killua commented "you needed us" he looked up mischievous.

"Killu!" Gon frowned, making his friend's smile widen, oh he was unstoppable " you helped us so that you could get your precious-precious and useless- blue- planet- little- worthless- gem"

"IT ISN'T WORTHLESS YOU -" She took two steps but was held by Gon.

"Biscuit! He likes to bother you! Please don't fall for him! It's a trap!"

Everyone burst on laughter. She collected herself again in the ladylike composure. "Oh god.. I had forgotten the patience I needed to be around you"

"Oh god YES!" Leorio and Kurapica turned their head in sync. "You're soo right!" Leorio added and Gon imperceptibly looked down. Biscuit fixed her eyes on him

"So!" she raised Gon's chin, her other gloved hand taking her waist in keen balance "tell me Freecs, why am I here? Are there juicy enemies to fight ?"

"ahm..."

The room's mood visibly dimmed. Leorio and Kurapica exchanged a glance. The cold distance between them disappeared in seconds.
"There shouldn't be any enemies now, right guys?" The doctor was swift to take the word at Kurapica's appalled expression.

"No, there aren't any enemies actually..." the small raven hesitated

"Oh... so I really am here for no reason...?"

There was a bored sigh, and Kurapica noted it was from the pale boy in front of him.

"It was me." Killua raised a hand, with all the seeming of being at ease. He wasn't "Gon contacted you because of me as he said " he replied easily, shrugging, a gesture that did not accompany the low in his voice

"Well, to cut the chase, I need training" He rose his gaze to her sensei. Not an ounce of doubt on his firm voice standing in all his height. "And you're such a devil at making us sweat and suffer Biscuit, you're perfect for the job I have in mind" he smiled.

Biscuit's eyes lit in appreciation of his student. She seemed to take his words as an enticing challenge. She extended her hand, a fang flashing in her grin "But you'll have to do everything I tell you to do"

Killua took two steps, to seal the gesture.

"I will" Killua met her eyes with defiance.

Gon all the while stared at Killua. He suddenly stood so...strong.

He felt humble. He...he had an idea about what Killua meant. Hadn't he? How it had frozen him before, it all—it all made him seem the more... but Killua's eyes fell on him, and the leap of his chest made Gon look elsewhere.

Leorio heard each of Killua's words and was abruptly aware of Kurapica's closed expression. He was stunned, his gaze posed over the kettle at the table.

Biscuit tilted her head bright "I can make you stronger Killua. However, I've always thought battle enhances everything. If you are free I could send you to places in the planet that would be marvellous rings for you both-

But Killua's hand signalled her to stop

"Wait wait. The guys and me have a... strict curfew right now... and honestly I'm not fighting anyone any time soon. But I have to be ready. I do plan to fight someone in the eventual future." His voice did not waver. "And it won't be easy, so it would be awesome if you helped-" He was cut off by Kurapica abruptly raising to his feet.

"What do you mean" he'd turned to the boy "Killua- we have to speak about this first-you-"

But abruptly he cut himself as if regretting Biscuit's presence.

"No...Kurapica..It's not... " A flare of pain in the violet eyes before Killua assumed his poker face. "it's not what you think, I.."

"mmm" Biscuit observed. "Ok lovely guys...you speak and settle your stuff, Gon is helping me make tea and bring the cups. That pretty kettle must be already cold "

Because she was that clever, Killua had thought.
Yes she was clever enough to know who wasn't wanted right then. She winked and took Gon's hand.

"no but-

"I'll need help with the cups Gon!"

Gon looked back, reluctant. But he sensed he wasn't wanted there either… And that just made his guts drop to the floorboards in front of him. He followed Biscuit in silence

Their eyes were on Killua. It was as if the room had darkened and a beam of light was on him. The pale boy sat at a chair.

"Hey guys…" he was getting used to this.

"What did you mean" Kurapica asked directly "you're not training to fight them are you-

"It's not what you think." Killua cut in trying to avoid any more of the morbid remorse. His let his hand clasp his sit to remain collected. He closed his eyes, inhaling "but… we need to talk so… "Kurapica" he looked again firmly to the clear blue eyes " and Leorio… I have something to… say..."

Both of them sat in front of him in silence.

He would. He would tell. He would tell... them the truth

**Well, the half truth he'd always planned on telling-The other half wasn't existent...**

But he'd ordered his thoughts, he knew what came now.

He inhaled to speak.

---

For a seven-year old like him, it was as if he'd been waiting for days and years and still midnight wasn't any time soon.

At some point the electric coil of feelings rushed in without warning and with violence, and he seemed unable to pull the brake, and they hit him- shame, shame, shame, shame-guilt, sorrow-guilt, helpless-guilt, shame-regret, shame and he hid behind the parked cars, chin on knees breathing.

Time ticked and tacked and then the feelings burnt away yet again and he began playing with his yoyos. Then, when even more hours echoed his steps, he just felt bored to death.

The small animal probably wasn't expecting Killua to climb casually to his side. The hazel cat looked at him, pondering his human size and threat. It observed him, with large orbs, perfectly still from the window. So so still, as if it believed it wasn't seen or as if it was in a serious attempt to dissolve in the wall behind. . Killua's feet dangled from the height of the abandoned building, looking at the caramel color.

For minutes both accompanied each other's silence as if through an unspoken agreement. But suddenly the cat bolted to the roof. Killua observed him at first, wondering if he'd been the cause, if he'd done something wrong. He felt tired. There it went his sole company. But then he inhaled and decided to follow.
He felt the roof tiles under his shoes and there it was, little small cat at the other end, looking at him. It had definitely been waiting.

It wasn't a chase. Sometimes the cat fell out of view and Killua hesitated. Then the cat made itself present almost patiently for the boy to track him down. Most of the times though, the boy's speed and keenness seemed to surprise the little cat, and a competition of agility and stealth began behind the chimneys. They were playing. The boy liked it, he heard down the gutters the echo of his own shy laughter. It turned into a game of hide and seek. They jumped far off from roof to roof in a strange form of parkour as dusk faded into night.

The cat arbitrarily stopped in an old roof and plopped as cats do. It turned on his back tumbling from side to side scratching his back. Similar to the way Milluki's cat did before he disappeared. Killua squat to his side curious, whilst the cat stroked his left ear. Killu extended his hand slowly... he found himself petting the little cat, its furry belly. It was a small cat. Not long ago it'd been a kitty. It looked so small, he liked the cat immediately. He had liked it from the start. Little small cat.

"Do you want to be my friend?"

It'd been purring for some time and the boy smiled.

Then a cursed thought disrupted his mind with the force of cloth being ripped. He blocked it, his hand suddenly paralysed. Awareness could not be undone. He fell back and away– he had always been curious with the world but this didn't - this curiosity didn't qualify like- and he'd been at ease rubbing its belly and then-what if- and he'd shut his eyes but those had been his thoughts-what if- If he did things to the cat, the way he had to do things to... to... Him. Would the little cat, would - the thought, he burnt it burnt it, drowning guilt rushing through him like a wave. He didn't even know how cats were done, were they done like humans? The small cat sprawled trusting. The boy retreated repelled.

The cat stood, and stretched his small frame against the setting sun. And then it approached the boy once more with pleading eyes, probably wanting to be scratched. It began rubbing himself shamelessly to his withdrawn legs, before just plopping in his lap, without limits whatsoever, to rest nuzzling its head in search of a reaction. The boy held him feeling small, feeling lonesome. He didn't brush his fur, but the cat still purred at the human warmth. Little small cat he murmured. It purred back. He cast all thoughts away. As nanny taught him, a new friend.

It was slow. To cast thoughts away. But he found himself taking in the evening. And looking closely at his little purring friend, its tiny paws, its pink nose...

"Little small cat"

He told the cat how he'd broken another cat's tail. But that he was sorry. The cat just extended its head on his lap. He took one of its small paws and the cat let him, nuzzling his left ear.

Suddenly a church somewhere rang its bells claiming the eighth hour of the fading dusk. They rang, rang, they rang and rang, and the clamor reverberated the tiles-Four more hours to go- and over the roofs, the sky was immense. The cat was still against him purring, and they rang, rang and rang, and the small boy found himself wondering why hadn't he run away from home for real. He would turn eight soon and you know- this was just a passing thought but how it'd be to see the world and how it turned, the vales and seas beyond, to get to meet normal people like the ones in the movies, to get to play as the characters in his books, to do more than just assignments, to climb mountains and leave all the bad parts behind. But maybe outside was just as bad...but then his books, they only talked of adventures, the way Nanny explored with him like rangers in their huge garden. Their huge barred garden.
Nanny… that was why. And because he was supposed to grow into a good assassin, which he tried to achieve dutifully and to which he was failing miserably. He was not a runaway, he had honor like father said, he liked his father, he wanted to make him proud. He would return tonight, with a successful mission for everyone to forget all his faults...all his faults...

The cat had raised his head as the last bell he ran into disappearance.

The boy was stunned. He immediately rose, suddenly cold, in search. Maybe the game was on again?

But it wasn't. The little cat was nowhere to be found. *Good bye little small cat* Killua later, when he thought about that moment… he realized the words, hadn't they all the seeming of a farewell to him as well?...hadn't they…

___

"No sugar for Kurapica, regular for Leorio, four spoonfuls for Killua-" Gon was working efficiently- he wanted to get as fast as he could back into the living room. He'd meanwhile given Biscuit a brief run-down of their encounter with the phantom brigade. She'd nodded in interest. And then it was her turn. 

"Gon…" Biscuit hesitated, her gloved hand pouring the boiling water into the teapot

" I knew it!" Gon cut her "Killua is keen! Well, you're up to something Biscuit sensei. So.. What's up" he smiled with his honeyed eyes.

Biscuit found herself searching for the best strategy to inform him. How to share this with Gon without him exploding again like he had when he first saw her. She looked at him. She felt fondness.

"Uhm… ok.. Gon…as you both know I also came for a particular reason". She bit her lip, realizing she was the one feeling anticipation. Her eyes shone "Gon you must travel with me the soonest you can. Killua can come too of course-"

"Why? It is very complicated right now" Gon frowned, extremely confused.

"That's the best part! It won't matter when I tell you Gon! We'll found a way, this will really really interest you, you must come with me, I was leaked and know that-" Biscuit speech was muffled by a hand that covered her mouth. Gon's eyes were stunned, but he held it vehemently in place. He felt his actions an echo of something past but he couldn't tell when…

"Hey!" she worded muffling.

He slowly let go of the hand

"Biscuit…"

"I should punish you with the real push-ups for that! Well, you MUST hear this, its-"

"STOP"

Biscuit gem like eyes widened. Effectively detained this time. Her eyes scrutinized the younger one. His expression was anything but what she'd imagined- not enthusiasm but anxiety- his eyes almost pleading.
"Gon, what-"

"Don't tell me Biscuit. Whatever you found out and wanted to share with me... Don't tell me. I don't want to know. It wouldn't do any good, right now I can't travel, I can't. We're on the run, the four of us" he seemed to emphasize that "... so I can't-I can't-I can't" his voice lowered "because if you do tell me whatever it is that you have to tell, I'll- I don't know what I ... I don't know if I... We need to get to Whale Island, we need to, so let's leave it at this, just don't tell me. Okay? That should work out fine.." He trailed.

Biscuit expression darkened " I thought I was updated... Gon, what else have you been up to?"

"nothing." He whispered. He rose his head. He was faking a smile. That was definitely new, Biscuit observed. But Gon added.

"I think it's Killua who actually needs help. So I guess he'll seek you. And... I'll help him. And when I can... I'll help you... with... what you wanted... just... please... don't."

"I understand." Biscuit paused analysing, calculating. She added "When you're ready to listen to this I'll be right here to tell you."

There was an uncomfortable silence, Gon's eyes stuck on the chequered floor. "Gon" The auburn girl called out "let's bring them this wonderful tea you prepared, shall we?"

AAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAA

Half an hour and the little cat was definitely gone. The chase had left him near the streets where his target was dwelling. But it was three hours and twenty-five minutes ahead to go... and he didn't even have his game boy.

Killua had bought a cola-soda-can right at the beginning of the evening. He decided that it had come the moment to put mentos into the beverage and see it all burst, like the videos on-line. He looked for a place to do his experiment- in this part of the city, there seemed to be a fair amount of fouled smelled unobserved corners.

He searched inside his backpack as he entered an alleyway, but abruptly the tube of mentos fell from one of the pockets and scattered to the grime in the street.

He cursed loudly, the way no seven-year old should. Suddenly he felt mad again-suddenly the scene with all the figurines, and all of their stares -the dark eyes-He began recollecting all the small capsules back as he imagined what he would have said to Milluki had he had a good chance to yell at him. He wanted to bite Milluki and his mother, he wanted to yell at the greasy fat man who had kissed that girl, but he was dead and so was she. He wanted to rage at -at- it was so unfair, unfair, and unfair! Oh great, he'd dropped the mentos again-

Next time he would do things better and-

That's when the man caught him by his neck. The boy had completely blown off his own security measures, he was so engrossed in the inner dialogue, he hadn't even sensed someone coming from behind. As he was hit against the wall, small him reprimanded himself, almost rolling his eyes.

"Do not scream or I'll kill you" a knife was pressed against his neck

The child almost rolled his eyes, that by now definitely quoted a "seriously". This was surely karma -Gotoh always said stuff of the sort. He was hit against the wall "what boy, something to say?"
He stood obediently quiet, observant.

"Are you going to tell me you're story? Running away from home little rich boy? Playing in a dirty alleyway to impress your little friends in your rich school? Or what, where you expecting someone like me sweet candy, from the beginning?"

Of course his well ironed clothes, his nice hoodie and his sneakers gave him away as a spoilt rich boy. The knife pressed against his neck. Killua wasn't scared. He was calculating; completely limp in the man's grasp.

His lack of response was unsettling. "You're a quiet one ah? Ah? You're paralyzed in terror? Ah little boy?" The far-off lamppost made half of the man's features stand to the light, the other in complete utter darkness. He could see half his leering teeth, the crooked nose, the greasy hair and the gleaming sunk eyes.

The man was taking his hoodie away with the movements of a brute, yes, a brute with a knife. Killua could kill him. The problem was that if they found a body here, right here and now, he'd bring himself more trouble than respite. He wouldn't be able to complete his assignment- security would surely intensify around the area if the body was found shortly after his murder. And that completely took his chance to take his real midnight target by surprise. No, even if he was finally forced to kill this slob, and then do his assignment, the two killings could be linked in non profitable ways. Was it the Zoldicks? How dishonorable, the same modus operandi, but to kill a useless person… not even for money, just a poor drunkard, a Zoldick? He imagined his own father saying this at the table were they all ate. Ours is an honorable job, each of you remember.

He hesitated…Nanny sometimes said-

The man had looked sideways to the street nervous "Empty your pockets punk" he shoved him.

Killua turned his pocket inside out. He had nothing but the broken leg of a figurine, randomly stuck in there. His arms slackened.

"The pockets of your jeans"

He showed him how he had nothing. He hadn't brought his cell phone not to be GPS-followed after the mess he'd done. "Now, will you let me go?" The boy asked faintly "I'm losing time here…" The man laughed and Killua thought maybe he knew it wasn't true.

"You are quite cocky… I like that" the dark man licked his lips" well I'm taking your pack with me"

The boy thought of the contents. There were only some smoke detonators, his wallet with money which he could replace easily, devices to take blood samples, another tube of mentos, a coke and a camera. He needed the camera though.

"Ok… take it" the boy shrugged. Because the moment the man took of the knife from his neck and reached for the pack he would put him to sleep with a blow. He'd be just another drunkard in the street father would say.

He was... and the boy did not want to recognize it but he was...somehow expecting Illumi to jump out of a shadow. To protect him as he had done before...

But he wasn't anywhere. Rationally Illumi couldn't know where the boy was, maybe last time he'd tracked him down with his cell phone...

His training hadn't finished. Right now all the disarming techniques he knew ended with a dead body…that was not useful at all for the situation.
The man hadn't moved, just drinking the small boy's image… He gave a quick look to the street. It was empty and dark, except for the faraway lamppost.

"How old are you?"

"…Almost eight"

"I'm sorry kid. You are a young poor little rich boy." he seemed to sing "now take of your shirt"

The words had a ring of dejavu that he could not register well. So he wanted that too?

"Ok" the child nodded simply. "But I can't do it while I'm hanging, if you haven't noticed sir"

"Ah you won't be such a little punk when we're finished." The men's eyes gleamed to the low lights.

Suddenly the hand grasping his clothing's moved quickly to his neck. The man pivoted the knife against the t-shirt and cut the garment in two in a sickening strike, grazing his skin in the process. Killua was gagging when the man loosened his grasp around his neck, taking the rest of cloth pieces with the knife.

"Was that ...n...necessary? ...Really?" the boy choked.

He was hit against the wall, and this time his skull rambled. He hung again from his grasp, without his t-shirt, the knife persistently at his neck.

"Who do you think you are punk? Ah? Just another self-centered boy who believes to be unafraid of all? You just wait and see" He breathed heavily against his ear, the knife circling his neck.

His family would be ashamed of him were they to see this situation. Maybe it was better to kill him. Agh- no, being ripped off was better- He repeated himself- he would give the man whatever he wanted as long as it didn't interfere with the mission. He hung from the man tired.

"Now boy do not scream or I'll stuck this hard in your neck!" he threatened with a raspy growl –yeah right- sure you will- but then he was stunned. One of those coarse hands had reached down there.

The boy's eyes widened and the man fed on the gesture.

It only lasted a looked at one side. So that was his deal. He hadn't realized until that moment that the man wanted sex. Killua sighed pissed off. That would take more time than just a simple robbery. The man hadn't stopped, saying horrible stuff as he groped him and did stuff. He registered detached how it felt good, nice as when Brother had done so. But that was all, it was never …He always grew bored after some time "Take of your jeans now. You've got both hands, I'm waiting."

He was hit against the wall

"Now, boy don't make me wait-don't-" he wasn't getting the scared broken look out of the child, just the dead eyes that moments ago had flashed, and it disturbed him.

The small boy without hesitation opened his belt, took it and let it fall with a clutter to the ground. He opened his jeans, lowering his zipper with automat movements, his gaze hollow. He was reluctant and did not move further... he knew he was wearing some dinosaurs boxers...he felt stupid...

"That's it boy. You're finally getting it. If you act nice I won't take much of your time eh? Do you know what I want now?"
"Yes...should I kneel" he asked with a low empty whisper. And realized it was not necessary because the man was standing. But the man's liquid eyes gleamed. "Who are you kid?" The tough hand holding him by the neck had flown to his own pants, the boy fell on his feet, the knife all the while pointed at his heart as heard the zipper being lowered and his own mild disgust as his gaze turned away. His left foot fidgeted with his right foot as he waited not wanting to look. It would all be over soon- soon-soon- and he would continue with the mission and maybe they would forgive him... he felt small... he looked up at the man as he'd looked up a thousand times to -

THUMP

Simultaneous events followed- A bottle had crashed into the man's skull from behind- The man had fallen against the boy- and Killua conscious of the knife against him, held the blade with one hand as they both fell.

The wicked man immediately turned at his aggressor, grasping Killua by his hair- "don't move or I'll"

Killua guessed he was going to say "I'll kill the boy" but he just needed that diversion to twist the arm that held him, effectively disarming the man. As he did, the man was hit with the bottle again. The man stumbled blinded but grabbed Killua again to take the knife, it was all so messy- and taking the small hand, now in mind only the fight, he literally threw Killua away with sheer force against a wall to attack the bottled man.

Killua had taken the knife with a tight grip against the blade, something his attacker was not expecting as the boy was thrown away. As Killua landed against the dumpsters heavily he saw his attacker fall with one last blow of the bottle to his head. He saw the silhouette of the man with the bottle against the light. He incorporated from the piles of trash, feeling shirtless and his pants loose- but he now held the knife to whoever attacked him. But as he did so, a pile of unstable construction debris fell over him- He immediately ducked but then he felt a loud clang of metal against his skull.

And all went black.

XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX

Killua inhaled staring at the table. Kurapica and Leorio were staring at him in expectation. They cared so. Killua looked down… "Ok. About yesterday… you were really concerned." "if that's the reason you're training, it is not admissible" Kurapica severed his words with the precision of an ice-shard.

"No" Killua shook his head. Had he not the tight control of his body... He tried to repeat firmly "No. Kurapica it's not that. Yesterday…”

This was hard. That last word and the guys stared at him, motionless. With cold calculation he reviewed his personal mantra. It was safe. They were safe. No one was going to attack them, Biscuit was near, Gon was protected- safe. So mentioning Him- it wouldn't…the safe summary-Killua looked at them. He ‘d had long hours to think of it all, long long hours before Gon’s hand rested on his shoulder. Long hours in which Him-Him- because capital Him- He’d – He’d done – his jaw clenched-Damage.

He wouldn't let him-

Kurapica cleared his throat at the silence. That brought him back...
Killua inhaled barely. "Yesterday I lied" he spoke detached.

He only heard their silence. If they were taken aback they weren't trying to show so. He wasn't withdrawing anyway-he would not- as if seeking justice for all He'd -

And he knew he was taking a huge step.

One he'd never given before.

Killua exhaled and opened his mouth and spoke firmly "Yesterday I lied. I shouldn't have and I regret it. I panicked. But it was wrong of me, you deserve the story straight." He stated with resolution. "$I-$"

That's when a cell phone began buzzing and he lost the coherent sentence he had prepared. Perfect. As if he needed an interruption in his actual state of mind.

"Whose… Oh. Well, keep on going" Kurapica's arranged his voice from vexation towards Leorio to gentleness at the boy. Killua inwardly rolled his eyes and tried to ignore the instant dose of self-hatred – wrapping the feeling, stuffing it in a pocket for later. Now he had to be alert- he had to choose his words –he had to speak while he could-

"I told you Leorio, Kurapica, that the phantom brigade was involved in everything" He spoke clearly, and looked at them. Both nodded. Ugh. Again he found that poignant reminder, the kindness in their eyes and the phone buzzing to the point of utmost annoyance. Leorio didn't seem about to pick up, and none spoke. As if afraid of breaking the frail moment of trust. And the bloody cellphone-

" It's…" damn please shut that off- but the rushing lack of air caught him unprepared, his chest suddenly painfully tight "-I'm sorry –yesterday-yesterday-Kurapica-I'm...sorry" he closed his eyes " I didn't want to" he shook his head at the loose ends. He inhaled shakily "my intention was not to bring you down with displaced responsibilities! no, they are your own…your own matters… I know I did but you must get it right" He tried to regain control, he slowed down his speech. " It was never your fault Kurapica, in operation was only my –" twisted mind and twisted lies-

But his speech was forbidden by the sudden hand at his arm. It cut his breath.

"Killua" Kurapica called him "Do not worry about that-"

"wait-"

"You want me to feel better? Then do not worry about anything concerning me. Do not worry about whatever you said yesterday that might affect me. You want to help me? You not- worrying helps in an 80% of my feelings. Better?"

Killua stared at him for an instant, before he took a palm to his head. "This is not working. Let me finish so you can hate me properly" the boy let out desperate

"Killua, phantom troupe or not we just want to understand what happened to you". He looked at the boy directly. As if he knew more than what Killua wanted him to.

"Who harmed you"

Frozen. His heart skipped a beat. The cell phone had abruptly died and he...was paralysed under their observant eyes and he suddenly yearned the buzzing sound, any sound, silence and their eyes and the truth down his chest-silence-oh-he realized he wasn't breathing.
He closed his eyes. He breathed in slowly. He gained control. His mind began again his prayer—They were safe. They were safe. Right now Gon was with one of the best trainers in the globe, they were hidden from the world—they were—

This was so hard.

"Ok... It has to do with my..." he swallowed dry and clenched his jaw for resolution. He kept firm as he continued his monotone explanation "well, with my family"

Both adults had looked up. The cell phone began buzzing again

"Oh damn please answer that and be quick" Kurapica turned to Leorio angered.

"And why would it be mine you sissy! Geez" Leorio was worked up, in tourniquet anticipation as the blonde, but he turned an amiable gaze on the boy "Killua, go ahead an answer, we won't disappear."

"It's mine?" he murmured. He checked his pocket. His pants were those oversized ones, he hadn't felt it but, indeed, his pocket was vibrating. "Yes, it's mine"

It went unnoticed. But it hit him like falling on concrete. The room suddenly seemed unreal. Killua realized he had a knot at his throat. This was all too familiar.

He had a cell phone in his pocket.

He tried to collect his thoughts. That wasn't possible. He'd disposed of his cell phone back at the ship. He'd dismantled it and thrown each piece to the freaking sea for sure—His thoughts were going too fast for him to catch—He hadn't a cell phone, Gon knew the fact. But there it was, vibrating inside his pocket. He realized his hands were cold against the smooth surface as he reached for it.

It buzzed in his palm. He recognized it wasn't his old cell phone. It was unfamiliar. Dark red and black; technology advanced; elegantly thin. All this he registered.

It stopped vibrating, right there in his hand. The only thing in its small screen indicated a new message.

"Is it important?" Kurapica asked.

The boy read the screen in seconds. Then he smoothly placed the cell phone back on his pocket, turning it off with his thumb. He closed his eyes to sigh and look up. He shrugged.

"They do choose the best moments to inform you of their stupid junk mail, don't they" he exhaled so...in what were we.."

"What happened." Kurapica pressed with a precision that hurt. Their expressions hurt. After that it all hurt. The world was drawing into tunnel vision. Yet it hurt more, even more that his hollow chest, that his survival-trained-mind had weaved another lie in instants. He heard his silky voice from faraway, in a separate track from the distancing reality. Because despite whatever situation he would salvage the damage he himself had caused before anything—he would drown, not them, and there was the proof—all feelings that hit him-hit him-hit him-

Act.

Nothing had happened.

Nothing had happened. The show must go on, Freddy, he swore by his name and inhaled in apparent
"The phantom troupe did threaten me. You got that right" He shrugged. "However, it was not though how you pictured it. Yesterday you shot wild theories and I just nodded. I was tired and selfish"

Then he directed his stare right into the blonde's eyes with strange repose. "They did not seek me or attack me calculatedly. They were probably on the nearby vicinity just ensuring the basic surveillance of your persona. I just happened to run into them. I'm no hero. I never was"

Kurapica's eyes widened. It seemed legitimate. He was about to open his mouth when Killua cut him to proceed.

"No. no conspiracy theories to undermine you, it was all just an accident. Then, another misperception: What they did to me were mere scratches, I really didn't give a damn." his smile tilted "you forget you are dealing with a trained assassin. The supposed heir to the Zoldick's estate, ain't I? It just pissed me that Gon was threatened" he looked at Leorio "but all you saw were common battle wounds as any other." He breathed in air, reality, stay here.

"Well, as the story follows I should have given myself the proper medical treatment. I didn't. I feared you would find out. Why? because I wanted to avoid this" He gestured to the space between them. "You two worry too much, I knew this, and I knew you Kurapica would ostracize us and retaliate were you given the chance. And me and Gon were desperate for you not to fight. This is why I wanted to go unnoticed. I didn't fare that well as my rashness exposed me to Leorio, who found me harvesting an unwelcomed fever. You know the rest" he shrugged. "For me.. all the encounter and what followed was just sloppy done business."

It all seemed so creditable.

"that's why you sought them. To fight them for sure and avoid me getting..." Kurapica frowned

Killua nodded. "yes. As you can see, selfish reasons"

"No. You were trying to avoid me fighting..."

He shrugged. An again the melodic line of the lie touched the peaks of truth. That had been the actual reason for him and Gon to fight the spiders all along... to avoid Kurapica from fighting. Wether the one who injured him first were spiders or not, it was for his own to keep.

He exhaled "Well yes. Now, all that I told you yesterday had nothing to do with what accounts for my bizarre behaviour which has been what really troubled you" his fingers tapped on his bent knee. He'd already mentioned his family. It'd been a fatal mistake, he tried to avoid the dread. Fatal.

No. Not for now. Later. He would try to write the play over.

"The unviable threats of the phantom troupe, Kurapica, weren't what stuck on my mind, they don't possess meaning to me as they pose one to you. I've only had in mind that... after Whale Island, according to our Hunter Committee schedule... we are to go to... Kukulu Mountain, which I'm aware you know is my homeland." Again, lies came easy when mingled with truth.

"And I don't want to go." He whispered.. That was...true...so true..."The phantom troupe threatening Gon, for me is nothing... But that made me realize..."He swallowed dried... in truth..."My family... doing so..." his voice had broken and maybe he had given them too much...

Was He observing...was He seeing the movements , the frenetic movements of his marionette-Was he speaking too much, was he salvaging retaliation, or encouraging Him on- He closed his eyes stuffing forcibly the morbid thoughts back into the seams for later-.
"In regards to the phantom troupe though I had my fun fighting them Kurapica, we were morons and you shouldn't act kind to us, we were true jerks to meddle with your affairs. That had nothing to do with my own affairs as well. So you can stop worrying." He tilted his head. "And well. Gon knows nothing about anything. Not because he isn't my pal cause he is. It's just... when... it gets to that... I'm wary that he can be unpredictable" he shrugged.

"because you aren't" Kurapica let out

Killua laughed lightly. Kurapica was observing him... "You still took on you an attack that wasn't against you. And you took a fight that wasn't your own for my sake. I know you make it sound light but... I do thank you, I see your true motives"

He felt nothing. But had he felt anything he would have snorted at this.

They'd spoken, they'd asked things and he'd answered following the lines of his story. At all times they nodded in comprehension. As if that story suited definitely better his character than the one of the previous night. As if this convenient truth was quenching their desperate thirst for everything to be all right.

At a moment he repeated blankly "Now that I've explained… I can train right?" His heart did not skip a beat.

"Yes…" it seemed as if a weight had been lifted from the blonde's shoulder. *Mission accomplished,* he thought feeling empty. He stood up "Now I'm picking up something in my room, but I'll be back. Thank kiddos for hearing this…"

The lines of expression that had aged them from one night to the other were gone. They'd assured him again and again that he didn't have to go to his homeland, and that if he went, they'd be by his side and he'd nodded again and again to their words as if they were real, as if they mattered...Two strides and he was away from it all.

He almost bumped with Gon at the door carrying a tray. He avoided his questioning gaze and moved past him. In truth... *he was the only thing in existence that could strip down his* façade. *He almost shuddered, but just moved past him.*

"be right back"

His stride kept a normal pace. His hands in his pockets. Until he was at a safe distance from the room.

Then he began longer strides to settle his heart... this one only seemed to regain its beating painfully. Faster,and faster. The coiled dread assaulted him and he closed his eyes running. Until he was at the bathroom. Lock, inside, and he took a hand to his mouth. On his knees-it seemed he'd slid against the door, his head hid on his knees. He kept there for long minutes. Then he stood, he washed his face with cold water. But the bodily experience, he couldn't stand it, when he'd always stood by so much without an ounce of feeling, now he couldn't stand his own skin. The message-*the message-the message-*

He'd been a fool.

He'd been a fool to believe.

He'd let himself believe. There his faults lay. He'd sold himself to the promise of safety.

He'd been a fool. He'd been stupid-stupid-idiot idiot-
17:30

-It is priceless, to watch you sleep, brother. Endless possibilities. Did you like the present in your pocket?

He reached out to launch his cell phone at the mirror- he almost saw the exploding sharp pieces. At the last moment his fist held it strongly in its hand.

He collapsed on the floor his breathing going faster and faster. He closed his eyes. Yes, he closed his eyes at what he was going to do. He would. He took his cell phone. He typed boldly as he'd never done before

"What do you want Illumi. Sex? Really."

He'd sent it before he had afterthoughts and was only left with the rushing adrenaline as he held it against his palm, its lines marked against his skin. And every extending second was worse than the previous one and words were crowding his mind-the ones he'd spoken- the ones he'd told- The artefact buzzed again in his palm with the answer.

All of his thoughts froze in his head. But his gaze met the message before he processed it and by mid-line his hand had crumbled the phone in his hand. He punched the wall once, sustaining his strength in that one motion, breathing fast. He let the mangled gadget fall to the floor. His forehead pressed to the wall, as he closed his eyes. The words were engraved in his mind.

"We've had our fun. But no. What I want?
I want you back."

**************

(8) Me well I'm well, well, I'm mean I'm in hell
Well, I still have my health, at least that's what they tell me
If wellness is this, what in hell's name is sickness?
But business is business and business
runs in the family...(8)

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Chapter End Notes

A/N:

Cliffhanger...yes...
I'm sorry... If you find it in your hearts please forgive me. It's been months.

During the time elapsed I've had small ups and... serious downs... I got to the lowest at a moment. I was on the verge of doing something you would have probably found infuriating, stupid, or incomprehensible. Since it's the pit of all the lowest I could get as off yet, I guess there was no direction but upwards. But that was long before I came here again. To humour it all it isn't a climb of hope and happy-go-lucky Miley Cyrus song-like. Its more like hanging on a cliff and grabbing at the ledges, knowing all the while you have the power of volition to let go.

Now I'm better, much better, actually. It was a long lonely process. Connected was that I got to the lowest in financial terms. I was really poor and when I reseted I just had to work double or thrice. That cast thoughts away but it also put this in the back burner.

I'm too young for all the thoughts I harbour...

Now I'm finally knitting back all the threads I left up loose, this being one of my deepest attention.

If you are reading, I thank you deeply for waiting, even if you are cursing as you read this lines. I'm sorry if I am biographical some times, I just want to reach you in the most sincere way I can, I can't do it any other way. In actual human communication and interaction. I'm not the unveiled mysterious author in a pedestal. I'm a pedestrian who has nothing to hide and who owes you for the lengthy absences. In my defense I give each chapter serious work.

Because you have your own power of volition I'm sure that the ones out there that don't need an explanation for my faults, or the ones that hates a/n will skip this without my aid.

You are free to read whatever you like.

So thank you for reading this actually.

Many of you reached out to me in my period of silence. I've read you. And each of your words was of real importance to me, it probably made a difference some way or another. I'll pick up the trying- to-reply-to-all-my-reviewers. But I'll reply to you guys first.

...I told you I won't censor myself, so I can only warn. Now I'm tired even of that ha ha. I think that from now on I'll dispense of the warnings. Maybe sometimes I will warn you when I remember. It’s not that every chapter from now on is a crude deal. No, it's rather that each chapter references each other in all meaning levels. So I'm expecting that if you have read this far, you've got the point of all the previous warnings.

Thank you all... really, to keep up with me...
As the child was stared at and spoken, his operative mind was running flawlessly. Teething in a separate track- scanning, analysing, calculating. Planning the escape route and the action to take through the dialogue as he stood in front of the stranger.

Yes. He was exhausted. He felt in overdrive. It had been too much in one day, bits of hours and past images forming stray patterns in the carpet floor. He wanted a vacation, a tantrum and a blanket. One day off from being himself.

That young, and he knew better.

Information gathered: Golden-haired man who answers by the name Andree. Works in a profession that sounds like a doctor. Tried to cure my hand. Possibly the one who took me from the alleyway rubble.

What else? He offered hot chocolate. Drank from the cup himself to pamper his distrust. That might as well be a trap. His current position was inside this man's dwelling.

He was so hungry.

Things not to be disregarded were that the man had asked for his name, his age, and the reasons of his whereabouts that evening. He'd only answered age, the more generic and less risky. But the man did seem curious, something he'd been taught to regard as dangerous.

The boy stared paralysed. He didn't know what to do. He hadn't been taught the protocol for encounters outside assignments. He...never left home unless for training. And now, assignments seemed a lot easier than this. The boy had no idea about how to speak to people. What were the cues...what was expected of him?

He kept still as a statue.

"Do you want me to fix your hand?"

The boy did not answer. His hand was taken tenderly. It was all so strange... Because...as the predator his parents were trying to rear, he thought with faint pride that he could detect it. That man's eyes revealed it, this doctor knew he was the one in danger, not the child. He'd understood the meaning of his claw. This man knew he was a child that could kill.

And that was even more confusing. You see, he seemed to offer help in truth, and politely omitted the fact. There wasn't fear on his eyes. He was kind... His eyes were kind... And the boy felt as if trying to read a pedestrian sign written in a foreign language. Or playing yet another game to rules he did not know.

And so Killua sat across the table, keen and wary. The man spoke while holding his injured palm, readying cottons and disinfectants on the table while he felt small in that chair- his feet dangled. But he knew better than to sway them like a child.

He wasn't a child.

He'd realized seconds before he was shirtless inside his zipped up hoodie. He felt strong aversion to the fact.
"Is this…" the child whispered, unconsciously pulling at the neck of the fabric, but Andree immediately answered concerned.

"Yes, it's your hoodie. I rescued it from the pile of rubble. I thought you'd want it back despite...and your shirt...well it was...gone I think…"

The kid kept silent.

Andree turned the child's palm to the light "Did the knife that man held made this cut?"

The boy assented, his gaze stuck on the floor. The cut was actually the result of a confusing situation in which the doctor had pushed the armed bad man towards him. He'd deftly taken the knife in between his palms to avoid any vital injuries.

"It must really hurt…"

It did not hurt.

"…Sir… why am I here?" Killua finally asked – and his voice sounded like the squeak of a mouse. Disgust immediately frowned his brow and closed his eyes. He…felt so tired... And weirdly enough he somehow felt the right to feel tired. But then he felt guilt. A strong yearn to be back in his bed, in that huge bed alone under the covers- gripped him. He wanted to say sorry to Milluki. He almost felt about to cry because he wanted to return so much.

But then he remembered he couldn't return- and the realization was an icy cold glass of water running unpleasantly under the skin of his chest.

But then the insistent buzz in his ears tuned in-

"Boy, you heard me?" Just when he was planning to nod his arm was taken. So instead, his heart missed an entire beat- a strong hostility gripped him- and next thing he knew he'd freed his weapon arm to stand behind Andree, his hand extended in killing mode.

Andree had raised his hands in the act, the child's nails grazing the skin of his neck. With a second of delay, the boy processed his position and reaction. He loosened his arms immediately, and staggered back with horror. It'd been an unconscious response. He only killed targets, preys, father had engraved that in his mind He only killed during missions. What was wrong with him! There was nothing fair outside that law, father always said- And Andree still held his hands high as he slowly turned to face the child.

There was nothing but benevolence and concern drawn in his face.

The child gaped. Then his attention was drawn to a stitch of pain that tensed his clawed palm. Only then he noticed the blood on his hand.

For one second he thought the blood wasn't his own and his pupils dilated. He quickly searched the man's figure, head to toe for any scratch or wound, skipping the pitying stare. He loathed it, as if those eyes were trying to make him smaller-but then relief… he hadn't hurt that good man it seemed.

*Good man? Since when he'd decided that pet name? But then the painful throb of his hand brought him back, as he staggered.*

He blinked "I-I…"

But he noticed Andree's eyes fixed on his hand.
Only then the boy realized that a line of black surgical thread- and the needle at its end- hung from his half stitched hand. He raised his right hand with curiosity...Oh, now he got it. The doctor had been talking and stitching his wound before his chihuahua- scared-jump -ugh- and he hadn't noticed. He'd-He'd zoned out.

That had only happened after long sessions of torture where he just fell asleep, worn out of the pain. And he was nowhere near that pain. But he was seven, new things always came along the way. Somehow he felt frightened to stressing levels. Maybe this happened when his mind was in overdrive. He wanted to leave. But the boy looked up to realize the pale Andree still had his arms raised as he took a step closer. As if to signify he didn't mean harm... As if the world was upside down and he, Killua hadn't been the one to almost kill him.

"Shhh boy, it Ok. Nothing wrong here. Stay there" He said. As if talking to a feral cat.

"I-I'm sorry…" The child whispered.

The doctor knelt in front of him. And he took carefully the hanging needle. Then he took his injured hand inside his own, and like this, he guided the child slowly across the room, back into the chair he'd been by the table.

The child, half stunned, let him, feeling guilt and hence even more attentive to commands.

"Here, put your arm over the table, let's do it together. You don't have to look if you don't want to"

His extended hand was again up for examination. He really hadn't felt the first stitches at all. Though if he now placed close attention, his hand was a deaf throbbing. The doctor however, didn't take the needle yet to continue his stitching. He was instead observing the boy concerned.

"Does it hurt?"

The boy thought. And decided truth was more comfortable. He shook his head timidly. It didn't hurt.

Andree observed him longly. Killua thought maybe this was how animals in the zoo felt like. And he surely was something weird like a kangaroo or a platypus... unfitting. He prepared himself for some kind of veredict about his persona, probably one with a bad prognosis.

"Child…do you feel well?"

Unexpected. As everything in this small encounter. The child realized he'd shaken his head timidly. Andree nodded gently. "What do you feel?"

The boy bit his lip. That was never asked of him. He focused on how he felt and realized it was slightly overwhelming.

"I'm so…tired" He murmured. He realized his eyes stung.

"Do you want to go home?"

The boy nodded distractedly

"We could call someone- or I can give you a lift-"

"No" the child shook his head fiercely before he'd begun the suggestion. But he did not lift his gaze or speak to add any further. His head just kept down, as if withholding from words. The doctor kept looking at him through the silence.
"Tell me child, you can't return?"

The boy barely inhaled air.

"…If you want, you can rest here for the night" Andree confirmed kind "I have that sofa bendable bed there… you seem exhausted"

"...Sir, what do you want from me?"

"I don't want anything from you. I want to help you." Andree let the words sink in the space between them before proceeding.

"Is there anyone I can call? I...know you may feel like you can't go back home for some reason... But nothing is more important than you. And you're hurt and you've just ...lived a difficult event. There in the alleyway... We really should call someone close to you, so they can pick you up and let you go home... so you can feel better"

The child inhaled slowly and spoke as if repeating a known instruction "I must wait until midnight. I must complete my assigned mission. Then I can go home." The soft words were enigmatic, the violet eyes expecting to be reproved or questioned.

Andree nodded slowly. Not prying further.

Odd.

"You can still rest here for as long as you want to. And you are free to go as well. Just let me finish with your hand to help you at least in something"

The doctor's good nature humbled him. He assented. And straightened himself, trying to be of assistance.

"I can stitch myself"

"Whao, no!" the man rose a hand to halt him.

The boy froze- an immediate response. Why is it painful to watch Eve? A kid used to obeying instructions or punishment.

"Let me be the one that stitches you. Like this you can relax and won't harm yourself" He spoke amiably.

Killua knew he wouldn't harm himself- he'd been taught to tend his wounds since before he could speak. But he abided silently. It was a bit fascinating for him- how could a man not bat an eye at the possibility of murder. It was like not blinking at the fang of the snake, or at the wasp crawling your arm, it was like those people who handled scorpions. The boy left the needle in the table, with a blank stare.

Andree wasn't surprised... So the rumours proved true. Just looking at the boy's hair colour spoke of no mistakes. Common sense indicated that anyone should-no, he needed a stronger word- ought to avoid the deadly Zoldick family. He never thought he'd live to see a member. If they existed, they had the materiality of a shadow. He... wasn't sure that after his actions tonight he'd get the chance to live another day. He looked at the child. He was as inexpressive as he'd been there down the alley.

The town's attraction. How he'd heard so many times that beings like those should not exist, should be wiped of the earth. Assassins...He'd heard from the old ladies at the market how they were a
blessing, casting their shadow of protection over all the nearby lands… Others said they brought the Mafia in. And every once in a while people would disappear to be found dead. Sometimes in groups. All killed without a question, or a known reason. Some, innocents in the wrong of another's way. Some, plain wicked in the path of far more wickedness.

And still…

Yes, he'd had to explain to her, he had ran and picked the small body from the rubble. He'd found his hoodie and covered him. And in a rough and impulsive decision he'd called police to the scene, immediately and hid the unconscious boy—he was a known sex offender on the run.

And the child was safe… and out of surveillance. It'd been but a hunch and he wondered if he was crazy, as he carried the small one home, against his chest.

Seeing him wake up violently, beholding the morbid transformation of the claw, the intent to kill in such a small frame was indeed a sight. It only confirmed his suspicions with surreal dismay. She would say that he was blind, that the detail had slipped through the cracks of his thick skull without sinking in. Like Eve always said. He was always acting the fire-fighter. You are my flame retardant… she said sweetly.

Whether this was true or not Andree knew he would never accept injustice… He still kept seeing the man, the knife, the kid in the alley, the words overheard. The unnerving resignation in the child's stance—and he felt his knuckles whitening. Yes he would help him. They always had done that kind of things no Eve? They'd always taken those risks.

And he wondered if Eve would forgive him.

x.x.x

"Killuaaaaaaaaaaaaaaa" Gon rushed down the stairs.

"Whoooa! Boy!" and Leorio spiralled to the ground.

Ouch. Gon turned slowly, big-eyed, with a default Oops-face on.

Leorio grumbled "You are in dire need of a season with Mitosan, aren't you"

Gon straightened at the name. His face morphed to acute repent. Comically he sprung to offer his hand finally

"I'm sorry Leorio-san! Are you hurt?" As if a wired chip inside his head had been activated. It probably had Mito's voice.

In the living room at their back they heard a suppressed chuckle.

"Yeah, I'm fine" Leorio stood eyeing Kurapica, who was acting as if they weren't there. The doctor sighed, and patted Gon's head with patience. "So! Tell me boy, what are we cooking today"

"Right now..." Gon suddenly sighed heavily "I miss terribly Mitosan's meals. Being out of money is kind of a bummer isn't it?"

"Well, it's just how we started… remember Gon how you taught me to roast fish?"

"Yup!" Gon chirped "You are right"

"Anyways Gon you're not the problem, you can feed on whatever without protest" Kurapica turned
his head to speak evenly

"Yeah" Leorio suddenly seconded him with emphasis "It's the other tick that acts like a royal prince when food is served!"

"Killua? It's because he's going to be a gourmet hunter when he grows up"

"He told you that?"

"Nope. I just know" Gon shrugged in affirmation "He will definitely be a gourmet hunter."

"I thought he'd end up being a black list hunter" Leorio doubted.

"Mmm... You're right. He'll be a blacklist-gourmet hunter"

"And what exactly is that? A hunter that goes around punishing people for making bad food?"

"Well he certainly is good at doing that" Kurapica uttered faintly, while typing at amazing speed in his computer in what seemed a cleanly separate track of mind. But abruptly he stopped.

"I must say though" They looked at the blonde "His protests do have a point. And by point I guess less raw would do..." He directed his eyes to Leorio for a second. Then proceeded typing.

Leorio virtually grew in height, the square of his jaw tensing. "Well maybe it'll suit Killua if I take breakfasts and you take the meals Mrs. Granger"

Gon giggled, and Kurapica's eyes shot daggers. Gon rose his arms still sniggering "Wait, wait. I didn't know you were having trouble. I can do the meals" He smiled sweetly "Mitosan taught me quite well" He nodded trying to sound reliable. Though he wondered if food was actually the point of discussion... Sometimes he could swear the two just liked to fight.

"Great Gon, you take meals, since I'm inept in cuisine, isn't it?" He sure though wasn't staring at Gon with anger.

"No... I didn't mean it that way-"

"Well do not count me in today, I'm not hungry. The sight of whining passive aggressive jerks takes away my appetite" He looked at the stairs and climbed up hurriedly.

"No offence to you Gon. Good night"

Gon lips tightened to suppress a chuckle. He tried to return to his original task acting as if nothing had happened ... What was it? Oh, right-

"Killua! Ki-lluuu-aaaaaah"

Kurapica took his fingers to his temples as if soothing a headache

"Gon he's not here, he's training with Biscuit. What do you want?"

"Oh" Gon's shoulders slumped a little "Nothing"

He walked towards the central windows, suddenly out of energy, to look at the snow storm outside.

"Funny that no one is worried about the two outside in this blizzard" Leorio grumbled his way down the stairs again. Visibly regretting his forgotten mug of coffee.
Gon wondered idly what kind of people drank coffee at night and why. Or what kind of people used their free time on decrypting infinite codes on black pages. You know, Kurapica's laptop's screen reflected on the window he stared. But the last incidents and ordeals he'd been responsible for quickly shook his head against any prying.

"Why were you looking for Killua?" Kurapica stood from his chair, pushing slowly down the lid of his laptop. As if he knew he'd been observed. "Maybe I can help you" His voice was neutral, guarded as the natural undertone to all his actions. But it was kind. Gon could tell his question was honest.

"It was nothing of importance"

"Really?" Kurapica spoke almost protective

Gon nodded, his gaze lost on the landscape outside

"I'm positive it's something really stupid. I just wanted to tell Killua that… I've never seen it snow. And it's amazing"

Kurapica's gaze softened, certain fondness at Gon's absorbed stance...So similar to that of children near Christmas...Eager with anticipation and quiet in amazement all at once.

Kurapica kept silent by the window, observing as well the white blanket that seemed to stretch beyond the world.

"You know?" the blonde lowered his tone "Me… neither." He accepted almost in a whisper.

Leorio hated to admit it but the dialogue had caught his attention.

"It'd only read about it… but…it's beautiful" Kurapica spoke pensive

"The fluffy falling stuff"

"Snowflakes"

"They are so...perfect" Gon seemed to find unfit any other adjective.

"Fractals..." Kurapica's hand rested on the glass pane "the water beads arrange in such rich geometry"

"So small for the naked eye" Gon barely whispered. "Snow, it's so strange…"

The sound of a door flying open came with the remark

"And you can't guess how fun it is"

"Killua!" Gon jumped. On three strides he was by his friend's side. Killua's lips were blue and his hair covered in snowflakes. At closer inspection his eyes had lines of exhaustion. But the light was stole by his vampy smile

"I had a bet with myself that you hadn't seen snow" His hand fist ed in victory "I WIN! Now what I didn't expect was chain guy over there not knowing colder regions"

"Killua, we talked about the name calling. It's dangerous"

Biscuit entered behind, opening the door that had been shut to her face, because as always Killua
ignored whatever manners there were of the few left on earth! She thought displeased, as she shook her coat.

"Well, Kurapica, at least you must have read about it"

"He has" Gon tried to contribute.

Killua giggled "Of course he has. Inside his head you don't find a brain, you find a toothy librarian mouse. And well, novelists are sentimentalists, and all poets take weather too personally"

There was a general take-in then burst of laughter. However it excluded Gon, who seemed confused while laughing nervously to go undetected. Killua felt warmth, one that he needed desperately at the moment. He took Gon's shoulder with more force than necessary.

"Gon, if you think watching snow is beautiful from the window, then outside, and on the roof it'll blow your brains out"

"Signed in" Gon game a small jump eager.

"And we can snowball battle and lick icicles. And slide down the hill in trashing bag slays" Killua didn't even know what he was saying but he let the feeling sway him, distractions were beautiful and Gon's eyes widened in want.

"Boys, you both should rest- Hey! Obey!" Biscuit bitter hag tone went unheard as one of the two kid hunters said "Race you" And that was the amount of regards given to proper goodbyes to the rest of the people. Vanished in thin air.

"I can't believe Killua's outside again. He was frozen" Biscuit spoke short of patience as she kicked her boots.

"If Gon's gone, who'll fix dinner' Gon? Don't leave!" Leorio suddenly panicked. Biscuit rolled her eyes, folding her scarf.

"I will. I'm not going out again, that's for sure"

Kurapica finally turned from the window

"You cook?"

"I've been on my own since I was fourteen. Of course I know how to cook. "

"Twelve there" Leorio pointed at the Kuruta. "Fifteen here" Leorio presented amiably

That explained so many things. She still shrugged.

"Then you both should know how to cook."

As Kurapica pointed the fact Leorio was the one with the problem, and he argued, she slowly realized she sounded like a bitter bitch on her fifties. Being the older here by far it wasn't a surprise either but she cringed internally. She really felt most of the time like the twenty five-year-old cute girl. Oh lord, she wasn't that old anyway. Killua just took too much of her RAM.

Leorio did not answer the blonde's flinging accusation but took a sip from his mug, his eyes never abandoning Biscuit's frame. "So…what are you going to cook?"

x.x.x
Lightning throbbed through his veins stinging in an odd refreshing way. Alive each of his ligaments, his bones and tendons tensed, every single of his strands of hair alive. The ringing pain strained his limbs unbearably, yes, but the heights were heady in his head, intoxicating of power, the magnetic sound field that cradled him, sickly sizzling. And Killua stared from those heights, beyond and below his feet, where the blanket of white stretched far. And from afar he saw himself, his arms raised open-armed above all. Resigned and fearsome, brash and fearless and all at once, his mind seething. He was there, standing in the midst of the mountain range… and far below, the world… planet earth was white and blue… and there was nothing he could do, oh do, oh do… his mind hummed.

He breathed the ice-cold air barely… His heart beating with gentler pain against his chest, the electric shocks subsiding...

_Not yet, not quite yet, no…_ It was inevitable though, how slowly hopelessness was taking the place of his lungs. They, the illusions, always seemed to spark for a second in glow… _He could try, he could try, but it did not…_

No! He could stop this.

...He even could from the beginning…

The skies were deceivingly dark. The wind was unpleasantly cold at his nape, but he had one burning idea in his mind. He closed his eyes. Some seconds ago he had perceived it.

He wasn't alone

The very tips of his fingers were galvanic, his nerves strung again and again to chilling frequencies before the pace slowed down. And now it was burning too soon, dropping to fast into the lead in his guts.

And then His figure came into vision. Static in his lungs and hair but when he saw His dark frame he felt his soul leave him. There it was carried away into the dark crevice of the mountains. It was expected. He'd come here to see Him. Yet still… still the uptight chest, the ready claws, the one step back he could not help.

Killua inhaled unwilling to let the grasp of reality go. The thought was a searing arrow through his mind.

And so he matched his stare determined, feeling numb.

"Are you coming to get me?" Killua's words were raw, and as they were spoken, a predacious hunger and rage overcame him. He wanted to kill… kill him… simultaneously as his throat was hung from an invisibly sharp meat hook. And he was aware he embodied the living contradiction, cause he was settling this for sure, but he wanted out... he wanted out…

Plan A. He ought to stick to that- he should have since the beginning.

_Biscuit didn't know anything of this._ But he bore her words in mind to a steady standstill. Illumi rose in height with each step, his right arm rose firmly, perpendicular to the line of his body. Thick pins were gripped tightly in his fist

"Killua, we meet again"...He was motionless, far in the next tower. Eye contact at such an unbelievable distance.

…and yet the words were whispered as if behind his ear. Illumi saw the broken power lines coiled
around his small brother's forearms, sparking dangerously. The beautiful violet eyes alight, menacing. And he felt yearn. He placed it in the hollow of an imperceptible smile.

"On your own I see"

A comment that as always, barely rustled the air, like fingers through gauze. His long figure was but a shadow amidst the blizzard … it was unbelievable. And yet there was an almost subtle intonation on the last words- imagined, non-existent. More piercing than needles.

"Making sure you don't trace us again" His tone was dead as the man in front was. He wondered why his insides had to shake, why his legs had to feel weak, why the wires had to tighten so visibly around his clenched hands. Because Brother saw each detail, because Brother saw it all…Killua read the disappointment in his eyes… why did it still had to hit so hard still, -ugh god knew-

"You have been improvident Killua. Quite undiscerning" His sombre intonation was uttered as if founding reality."Far lower than your capacities, as I recall… " Illumi paused "Or have they maimed with the years?"

No, he thought No. Gon had stood there on the dim-lit room, caramel eyes that read him when he took his shoulders "You took to spiders and Hisoka on your own, before Kurapica arrived Killua. Say that aloud so that you believe it. Say that aloud-

"You've proven quite a...let's say unfulfilling pursue" He spoke with derision. "A constant let-down..."

"I haven't had time- you know it- you haven't given me-"

*Ugh, why was he arguing?* He'd spoken as if it'd been other of His games. He looked down. He tried to distract himself with the height to cleanse of his words. The fall…it seemed mortal.

"So… did you come to point my mistakes Illumi? Or did you come for me? Maybe I no longer interest you"

Illumi observed him in silent.

"… Maybe Killua" he spoke with clean, stainless, steely words "I came here because you wished me to find you..." He uttered. Illumi saw the kid raise his head fiercely, those gem like eyes now two embers blazing.

"No"

"Is that so?"

"Yes"

"Tell me then Killua, what is it that you want?"

"I want you to disappear"

"Killua" He muttered his name, his eyes black, shimmering black in the white snow. The extension of his aura seemed convoked out of their void.

"Haven't you thought that… maybe you don't" And his eyes were unreadable, his eyes were cold, they froze him on place, how they froze him on place-.

"Maybe you don't want me to give up"
"Stop-" The insistent monotone was relentless

"Answer Killua. What if you want me here" He took a step "… Maybe…yes…Is it that you wish me to meet your friends?"

"Don't Illumi, don't you dare speak of them-" Killua suddenly growled like a wolf, pure loathe possessing his lungs.

"Then why would you want me here Killua?" Illumi tilted his head, taking another step that stole his voice.

"Maybe Killua, you wished to see me. You wanted my presence as an excuse for running away…"
His low mutter impassive "Maybe, Killua, you wished to be taken from the beginning"

No, no, no, and he felt out of air as he negated-

"And I could be the one to take you against your will." And his black words, all weight shifted toward that claim as if a vortex.

"NO"

"No? You don't seem that sure. Maybe you have already realized they do not need you as they once did." Illumi's blank expression and his heart missed a beat. A small voice inside him acquiescing like a painful cranial split

"Maybe you finally realized you have become a hindrance they are unwilling to dispatch… They are so kind-hearted…" Killua's knees bent imperceptibly "… Their heart is kind to a fault" Illumi barely murmured. "Kinder than you or I will ever be"

"STOP -DO-NOT –MENTION THEM" Killua suddenly roared.

Illumi stood silent.

"Will you come with me brother?"

The threat was extended.

The exchange was suddenly clear.

Come, or I will meet them his eyes conveyed, will you come brother, will you, yes you will, it'd always been there, the threat, but the time had come and he wasn't ready, and he loathed he knew his eyes were desperate-images-images- like the bone of the exposed fracture, right now was the time Brother would take him away…now.

The mere possibility, the only mere possibility not to see them again, hit him like a bullet between his ribs. Not to see them again.

Illumi extended his hand.

x.x.x

The boy had to concede the man a bow to the artful grip of his job. Andree's words were clear and truthful and mesmerizing as he worked. The boy hadn't actually felt the anaesthetic needle, as if he was truly a naïve kid fooled out of the pinch by words. The boy kept quiet at all times, vigilant. But the doctor told something funny and he laughed softly.
The boy bit his lip immediately, falling silent. He looked at the nearby clock. He still he had two hours to go...

"...you're still afraid aren't you?" Andree observed. The boy realized he was. So he shook his head.

"Let's play a game meanwhile I bandage your hand. You ask me whatever you wish about me"

Win. He had the boy interested.

"Aaaand the game is I can't lie. You ask me whatever you want and I'll tell the truth, I swear by Plato" he raised his hand in oath. Quite comically. He caught the small grin on the corner of the boy's lip, but under the white bangs of hair, the boy's eyes were still watchful. More so...cautious.

"Plato"

"He was a philosopher. And one who regarded truth quite highly"

The boy raised his eyebrows in unfamiliarity, but thought about it.

"And I can ask whatever I want?" He repeated softly

"Yes. Well, just as long as you grant me a few questions in return" Andree added dismissive- but the expression in the boy immediately sombered. He should have expected-

"Do not get me wrong, child. I'll answer you all you want, it is your game. In return, you just let me pose a question. You don't even have to answer it."

He'd caught his attention again.

"Really?"

"Of course."Andree assured "I thought of the game because I do a lot of couch surfing. It is the best way to know someone and make friends" His countenance was bright at the thought.

"...What is ...uhm...couch surfing?"

"It is when you let foreigners or travelers who don't have a place to stay, sleep in your couch. They usually are really grateful for this, and in return they tell you nice stories of their own"

The boy's eyes were lit for a second with curiosity

"That sounds fun".

This curiosity, it softened his brow and the unnerving monotone... And that felt truly rewarding. But the boy had looked down to his lap erasing the impression as immediate as it had crossed the doctor's head.

The child tried to reload himself with confidence. The confidence he felt while hunting for preys. He wasn't giving out information. He would be the one asking. He'd be in the place of the interrogator, a thing he'd been taught in strategy.

The place of the interrogator was fun- it was mean, arrogant and boastful from a quite safe position. He liked being the interrogator of Milluki in their games though he scarcely got to play it.

But strategy though was like math: so complex it sucked. He never understood well what they were talking about when it came up at dinner. But he knew the easier parts like being a gangstah
interrogator, like in the movies.

He looked up acting serious.

"What is your complete name"

Andree almost had a goofy smile observing the small boy all solemn.

"My name is Andree Antoine Shephard"

The boy wasn't looking up. His stare fixed in the cut inside his hand. He didn't know if that name was true or made up. But then the doctor's white coat confirmed some of it.

"Antoine is your second name?"

"Yes"

"I...like it"

"Thank you."

"Do you have hidden intentions Andree Antoine Shephard?" The boy raised his voice, trying to speak unaffected.

"No. None at all. Really." Andree laughed softly, trying to hide his fondness. He caught the doubting eyes. Andree insisted.

"I swear. No hidden intentions" He canted his head with sympathy. Sympathy, something the boy didn't seem able to figure out.

"Why… were you in the alleyway?" a poignant questioning stare.

He observed the rare violet colour, so bright and clear - and yet the boy's gaze did not reveal a thing. Fear or emotion, nothing…

…It was sad.

_Hadn't they seen those kinds of stares from others so young before Eve…_

…that did not make it any easier to reboot each time situations like this.

"…Why was I in the alleyway…" Andree trailed, inhaling to recall.

"I was walking back home from med-school. You see, I always drive back. However, this week my car was on repair, so I decided to take an ecosystem-friendly option and rely on my two feet. The way back though… you can tell it's not the safest trip through town, especially if they always let you out late and if you have a horrible boss"

The observant wide eyes were fixed on him like those of a cat unengaging.

"Soo by the second night I was seriously thinking of buying pepper spray." Andree laughed with openness "When, walking down the street I heard that… man's voice"

His hesitation spoke silent profanities, but he'd activated the childproof censor adequacy on time.

Sometimes he just forgot though he was speaking to a child, as Eve would never. His field weren't
children at all. And everyone knew children were a Complete- Different- World-and heavens didn’t he admire mothers, but now he was the only one in front of the child. And he wanted desperately to help him. And he knew vaguely the first step was getting this boy to trust him. Andree thought that though his interlocutor was small, he could manage…he was still quite creative on his intervention dialogues when he’d help Eve…

"… You were the bottle man" the child murmured.

"Bottle man?" Andree seemed confused before connecting the dots "Oh…I did take a bottle to …" The man ruffled his hair with one hand. Geez…his voice came out with bare sincerity

"I am the bottle man… I’m…I’m truly sorry… truly. That must have been so frightening. The whole ordeal … you are so small and you were so brave. I was really impressed. I am really impressed"

The boy seemed to stare blankly at the table. He didn't like being told he was small. The event wasn't frightening at all.

"…Why did you do that? The bottle thing, attack that man" He replied dryly.

"… I felt I had to… You see I was walking calmly down the street. And stumbling into that scene, it caught me so unprepared. I had to stop that man, and well, uhm, definitely all my other plans were even lousier. I just saw that man hanging you by the neck, and acted on impulse"

The fine pale eyebrows of the boy creased in incomprehension. "But you were not obliged to help me. At all. What...what do you want?"

Andree sighed. He was in front of a child whose world was a map of completely different values and coordinates and frames of reference…All cold. No place for a child…

"I saw a boy in problems. I saw he had you by the neck, and I didn't know what to do, but my immediate instinct was to help you- there's nothing more to that, and in that you'll have to believe me"

He saw the distrust on a minute gesture and Andree's voice raised in emphasis "Look, had it been you or other boy, I would've jumped the same, because I'm human." That seemed to catch his drift "I was not about to keep standing calmly while in front of me a child got hit and, robbed and –no-no–no, So I took an empty glass bottle from the floor and tried to sneak in behind that monster-"

"Monster?"

"Yes, that sinister-"

"He wasn't a monster monster" the child frowned skeptic "Monsters don't exist. He was a moderate thief with poor defense tactics and -wait" The boy interrupted himself. His face lost colour. For a second Andree thought he'd had to keep on convincing this child, but the kid turned his face to look wildly around

"My pack" He could not find it, and the room was small-he began to panic.

Andree let the boy meet his benevolent stare on his own.

"Look underneath the table"

He saw the violet eyes widen and nod. But the words were soothing by themselves, and yes, there it was, the pack he'd need in some hours. Killua suddenly felt immense gratefulness …Nothing had
hindered his plans yet. He repeated silently as Nanny had told him, it would all turn out well. *It would all turn out well.* He would kill the target. Then go home.

"I see you are very intelligent. Maybe above average" Andree lifted his cup to cheer. The move wasn't mirrored. Only the blank gaze.

"So…any other questions?" Andree humoured the boy with kind eyes. He held Killua's hand all the while, now pressing puffs of cotton to his palm, to stop the minor bleeding.

Killua nodded. But he didn't know really what else to ask.

He had to admit that …despite the distrust…He liked this game… it was an easy game. He liked this man. He seemed good.

"So you don't have any hidden intentions"

"Nope" *Patience,* Eve said. You'll have to repeat it again, and again. And again, as if he was learning the times table. He is in a way, so remember-

"…Sir, who is the woman in the pictures?"

Andree was effectively derailed.

"Ah, for that answer, you have to let me pose one question" Andree played his card.

The boy looked down.

"Do you want your hot chocolate?"

Killua's face had shot up with more speed than what he would have like to admit.

"Yes…"

"Great! Let me microwave warm it for you, it must have gone cold. So, shoot me with another question"

"But…you…your question…"

"Oh I asked you if you wanted your hot beverage"

The boy frowned. This man was puzzling because he seemed so …cool. Like Nanny…But then many of the games in his life with adults were confusing and not what they looked like. He tried to steady it all in the knowledge he possessed: games were always an interchange of favours. He still did not know well what this man wanted…but he would act obediently, he really would, as long as he wasn't delayed for his own task…

"So you asked about the woman in the pictures?"

The boy nodded.

"She's my wife Eve. Isn't she beautiful?" Andree's eyes looked at the picture with warm eyes.

"Yes." The boy nodded. He knew little about women but she had eyes like Nanny.

"Where is she?" He asked curious
"Ah, for that it will take another of my questions"

The boy exhaled and slowly nodded. Andree sat with the now warm cup in his hands. He offered it to the boy.

"Small boy why can't you return home?"

The child looked at the table fixedly.

Andree felt as if all connection had suddenly been lost.

The silence elapsed, and probably would have elapsed to infinity if Andree hadn't spoken out finally

"Very well. Do not worry. Now it's your turn to ask me child" He smiled. The boy felt his throat tight. "No. That is unfair. Ask another question"

A silence opened between them.

"You have a fine good heart for a child so new" Andree murmured in mild analysis. He observed the kid in front, whose gaze was still fixed in the table.

"Well I was wondering, did you know the man in the alley?"

"I didn't." The boy looked up as if thirsty to compensate his lack "I was chasing a little cat, but then it disappeared and then...then the bad man came from behind and I was really careless...stupidly so... and well, he grabbed me and I..."

He stopped hesitant. There stopped his recount. Because Killua was quite capable but he hadn't killed that drunkard and he wasn't about to tell Andree how capable he was of killing that man. He couldn't afford to kill him. And to speak of it was strategically wrong. He was only Brother's angel of death...

Andree felt certain relief at the boy's half answer. If the man was enkindled to that child, or...if he was one of his targets, which was a true possibility, Andree would most certainly be in trouble, since he'd put that person behind bars. Not that he felt any sympathy for that scum regardless.

"Well, you asked who's Eve..." the man drank a little of his mug. He silently began gathering words in his mind with care, as if planning the brushes for a portrait, for the child in front.

That child, with that attentive expression seemed the perfect listener.

"... I believe Eve is the most talented artist I have ever met." Andree's eyes glazed "She is also the strongest person I know...Her brilliant papers got her to be the Editor in Chief of a very important magazine, Woman of the World. She guided seminars on modern feminism. You should see her use of such big intelligent words... you know, words like circumlocution, like parsimonious, like unparagoned and assemblage, constabulary, and gratuitous, and so so many more fancy complex words she spoke. Words she used for others reflect on justice and well-being... And after she came from work, she liked to paint...she could be in one canvas for months... and she could paint three canvases in one night in a fit of inspiration. The best was that she let me observe."

He didn't know what was editor in chief, or feminism, or those big words, but Eve sounded really cool.

"She let you see the paintings?"
"Oh yes! And how they were slowly weaved into existence, such a myriad of colours! And each one had a story…and a free hug at the end. And her hugs were just great"

"They were un..unparagoned?"

"Very well!" Andree congratulated him amazed. Nanny had used that word once. He rejoiced a little in pride. The boy cleared his voice, acting serious again, chin up.

"Where is Eve?"

"Right! *That* was your original question… not who… well…she's dead"

The violet eyes widened. The boy fell silent.

"Yeah..."

The boy observed the man's fingers caressing his temples, where his golden hair was prematurely receding. Andree gave the prewired sympathetic smile but saw the boy bit his lip.

A haze of avoidance had slouched the boy's entire figure. Suddenly Andree had a recognition blast of that stance

"Well….you should know that my Eve died in a car accident."

The silence that hung between them, weighed less. *No, little boy, Eve wasn't murdered...*

Well, you could say that somehow yes, she had been murdered, but by mere chance, not by the hand of a Zoldick … Because to a Zoldick, even a small one, hearing of death ought to bring certain degree of paranoia, right? Eve, am I crazy for doing this? He realized he'd kept some seconds looking at her in the photo by the wall, and the boy was respectfully waiting for him to return to the present. His eyes with a hint of...

…compassion.

"Well, there you go"

"I'm sorry" The child murmured with honesty. Eve didn't sound like someone who should die. Only bad people or stupid people had to die, he'd been told. Nanny though said stupid wasn't on the list. But Eve sounded like someone that could be really missed...

Recently he'd been told that people who were on the way had to be killed as well. A not- to-be questioned instruction. He still was having trouble learning and settling that though.

Andree shrugged "It's ok. I'm also sorry… but it was some years ago..."

"It is your turn" the boy said, offering Andree a mug of chocolate to the man with a shy smile, doing what he thought Nanny would do.

Andree took it. This seemed the child's attempt to ease the doctor out of the painful subject, he noted. This boy empathized. And a lot for his young age. He was actually very sensitive of the other's well-being.

*It all seemed the more wrong.* Children his age were supposed to be more selfish than this, which was healthy.

"Thank you lil guy" Andree took a swig of his own chocolate and swallowed down.
"So…ask me, my turn" the boy's leg dangled as he shyly took a cookie from the plate between them. Andree sighed.

"It was important for me to know... did that man do any harm to you?" The doctor made sure to keep his gaze firm yet gentle.

"No…” the child negated with a shake of his head "I mean uhm … the cut in my hand, but that was more of an accident I think-uhm chance" And now his hand was already bandaged so no problems there.

"But did he do any other harm to you?"

"No… he tried to steal my things but he didn't take them" The boy hesitated, not sure of what was being asked of him.

"That's really great" Andree exhaled sincerely "We didn't give him a chance to steal from you. Cheers" He raised his mug and the boy stretched to reach out.

"Did the man do any other harm to you?" Andree insisted softly

"I think no…” the boy frowned confused, dangling his feet. It was his turn to ask questions which was fun, but Andree kept asking-

"Mmm… But then…did that man want something else?"

The child frowned again…The abruptly his eyes lit

"Oh! You mean the sex? Yes, he was asking-" he realized the man's eyes had flashed. His tone automatically lowered and he suddenly felt scared.

"He...he...he wanted ...em...sex ...of me." He wasn't even sure if that was the phrasing. The man seemed to know that it was the banned word-

But Andree recovered his speech "Tell me, did the man get a chance to do anything in that sense to you?"

The boy immediately shook his head. "No… the bottle man… I mean... you appeared. But it wouldn't have mattered really, so it was no problem" The boy tried to sound reassuring.

"What? no, no no, it would have been terrible, it would have been horrible if he had gotten a chance to harm you in that way." He spoke alarmed "Golly, thanks he didn't" The doctor enacted relief as he took another sip of his cup. What Andree felt was that unspeakable inner wrath and the dismal of the realization…

The boy kept silent some instants. He frowned. "...Why?"

"Why it would have been very bad if he'd managed to get what he wanted? Because it would have been tremendously unfair. It would have been very" Andree sighed "Very damaging for you"

"Damaging?" The violet eyes were clearly puzzled as if trying a new word.

"Okay. For the record… you do not need to answer any of my questions... But if you do, small one, I promise I won't judge you. I promise...I just need to check, a crumb of no importance" He tried toning down "...Do you know what sex is?"
The boy looked down, his cheeks were a tad flushed. He nodded silently, not lifting his gaze

"Someone has explained it to you, small one?"

The boy nodded again, but Andree persisted "Are you sure?"

His arms were crossed, defensive "Yes. Birds and bees and your and their parts and doing stuff and nice and nots I'm not stupid" The child spoke evenly, and his phrasing was so strange... "I know what adults mean when they talk about it... it's just sex, I'm not dumb" he spoke quietly.

The doctor exhaled longly. "Of course you aren't. At your age I hadn't a clue about what it was though." God, he really didn't know what he was doing here… Eve help me…I haven't a clue-

"Well people do it" the boy explained as if he was the adult "It's there on the web as well. But it's forbidden to search about it and I don't" He assured.

"Well the fact you know is progress in this conversation by leagues" Andree trailed. "You see, what that man was asking was not sex. It was abuse"

The boy seemed perplexed. As expected. He seemed to have been told different as his mouth opened and closed again. The doctor proceeded "There's no such thing as sex between an adult and a child. Maybe you know the word because you've heard it on adults speaking… but sex always always happens between two adults. Otherwise is wrong."

Of course he knew his definition was coarse -what about teenagers with teenagers or elderly people abuse and some other taboos like healthy paraphilies like the one involving shoes - EVE HELP- BUT the definition would serve for the purpose with the kid in front, at this moment. Something digestible, something manageable, he needed the boy to believe him firmly, and to understand any other else was wrong.

The boy's hands were gripping his seat. His question was barely audible

"Why is that?"

"Well… it'll be hard to understand but, you see, sex is only between adults because adults are ready for it."

He saw the immediate doubt and defiance in the child' air, he definitely knew best, but Andree proceeded "The most intelligent child or the strongest one is not ready for that, even though it may seem otherwise… You see, even if it" he sighed "If that man made it sound similar, it is only in the surface. In the truth of it all, not only in sex, but in whatever interchange between an adult and a child, there is a difference of…power…"

"Difference of power…" The child repeated faintly, as if trying to place this.

"Yes, there always is. It allows adults to teach children for example. How to eat, how to read, don't you think? An adult knows, a child doesn't until an adult teaches him. But it may allow bad adults to use that difference of power for their own good"

"… What power?" The boy was really confused. Yes Eve, he wasn't cut out for this. The boy had a real high IQ but that didn't mean he wasn't still seven. The boy was probably thinking on superpowers. Andree inhaled.

"You see, as an adult, I have more experience in life and more knowledge than you. That leaves you at a disadvantage."
The child nodded slowly. This sounded like strategy. Like the interrogator that had always more advantage in the game because he had power…Killua thought it was true. Adults in a game had more advantage than children. They always came out with things one didn't know and knew the answers before one.

"And that disadvantage happens not because you are unfitting, but because you have fewer years living on this earth and are smaller. You are an excellent child, really clever. But the difference of power lies in the age."

"The age..."

"Yes Ok, you must be thinking now that you don't have any way to know if I, as an adult, mean to harm you, a child, using that difference in power… because that man out there in the alleyway tried!" Andree spoke with unrest.

"We barely know each other, but … I want the best for you as I want the best for any child. I will never harm a child if I can avoid it. Whoever needs help, I'll try to help always…as Eve did..." He trailed…

The child tilted his head...and smiled faintly...sweetly "I… I believe you..." He murmured.

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The child tilted his head...and smiled faintly...sweetly "I… I believe you..." He murmured.

Killua felt uncomfortably alien in his security, he felt humble and quite confused… but safe. It was like being around Nanny or Gotoh, or his father.

The doctor sighed "Thank you… Then you must believe this is a fact for real and true…" Andree returned to the topic "There is a difference of knowledge, a difference of power and trust, between a child and an adult that could make any business the most unfair. In the case of sex and abuse particularly, it is deeply unjust and harmful. This is why it cannot possibly be called any other but abuse..."

"That is why children should not kiss in the mouth?"

"I believe children can kiss whomever they want on the mouth. But if a child wants to kiss an adult, it is the duty of the adult to tell him it is not appropriate, but that a kiss on the cheek would do just as fine" Andree smiled, trying to place all the pieces nice and neat over the table.

Of course again, this changed from culture to culture- and reminding himself yet again of the importance of getting through the facts-

"I should know all these" Killua whispered. *He was always one step behind, always second guessing the games and failing at doing so*-

"What? No! You actually seem to know far more than what you are expected." Andree let out. The doctor then collected himself.

"So...knowing more is not wrong. And not your fault. I'm afraid though that you may have a distorted or wrong impression…what you should know and must stick to is that if ever again an adult tells you to have sex with him or her, you say NO. You must protect yourself and don't let them. It is not sex they're asking, it's abuse. He'd be... using you...and abusing you in the worst sense, which is wrong, so you just scream and shout"

Andree nodded emphatically, opening his arms to emphasize the gesture.

"Using..."
"Yes..." Andree spoke gravely. But then his tone rose to a more cheerful one "But thanks to greatness nothing happened to you...THAT is something to celebrate. Shall we? I have some Jaffa cakes here I think..." The doctor stood and turned giving his back to the boy, to look on the upper shelves. He heard the abysmal silence.

It extended…and extended...

"Jaffa cakes are the best. I'm addicted to them" Andree commented but the silence prolonged. Well...It was to be expected. He could almost hear the engines humming on the child's head. Too much loaded information.

"- Well" he turned his again to face the boy "On summary, you just keep yourself safe and sound, any next time you scream out loud and clear"

He took the boxes of sweets and lowered himself down.

The boy's gaze was cast down. The small fingers that had been constantly playing with the fraying gauze of the table's blanket were now frozen. The silence was almost drowning until the child stumbled with Andree's concerned eyes.

"Are you all right?"

The boy avoided his gaze...but his lips parted, hesitant

"...What if...if it has already happened?" He whispered.

"What?" he could barely hear the soft words

"What if..." the boy trailed leaving the sentence unfinished

Yet Andree had suddenly heard in delay the last. His eyes closed.

Like the fraying rope of a dark well, silence was hung.

x.x.x
"What happened with you Killua?"

"Got taller than you for a fact" He tilted his head with grace.

... Biscuit stood against the white snow landscape, the whirls of blizzard lazily drawing waves down her ponytail. Why was he here? oh, yes, because they were in the midst of training. Because she this weather would be amazing to test abilities. Only one hour and he already felt a small percentage of physical exhaustion

... Yes. Biscuit was a good trainee.

The steely blue stared back. There was a depth in her observance and a tight line drawn on her jaw that meant bad news. But honestly he'd answered brilliantly all her demands non-stop. She remained silent, expectant of a more worthy answer.

He stared at the skies. Soon night would be over them. His hands were on his pockets.

"What happened with me… mmm... got faster? Sexier?"

She bit her lip, her eyes like those of a well known chess player.

"It is easy to get faster if you are always on the run. Or am I wrong?"

"I GIVE UP! I give up. Tell me what did I do this time." His hands rose

"Really"

"Well, I thought I was stupendous" Killua opened his hands.

The snow fell on unpredictable constellations on them. On his nose and ears and hair. She did not seem to show any sign of weather sensibility. Quite as himself.

"Yes, you are well trained if that's what you mean. You are very well trained, I doubt you need any more physical training for the moment. And No." She stared at him "You don't have any problem with your Nen as I guess you wanted to ask. But I did not bring you here to boost up your ego"

He felt unsettled but did not lose ground. These last weeks he'd seriously thought something was… something had to be wrong, broken inside no? but Nen being discarded was bewildering.

"Why did I came here Killua?"

"You… came here to …help me?" He trailed, shrugging humbly. "And maybe to get Gon working for you in secret plans of your own" He murmured the last, his hands on his muff
"Gee Killua! Is that what you think? " Her hands were on her waist as she paced in vexation. Her breath turned to vapour in that chilly weather. "So no clue hah?" she was pacing "You along with Gon have been one of the best students I've trained. I may not show it, but I'm actually angry that you of all are so willing to affect my reputation as a trainee" she sounded outraged.

Oh but he was incorrigible it seemed. He couldn't help finding all hilarious - her voice was soo high pitched.

"ARE YOU SNORTING?"

"No ma'am. Sensei" He corrected himself.

Biscuit glared at him. And her anger seemed of the serious killing type. Killua exhaled, doing a gesture to relax his neck

"I'm tireeed Biscuit. Tell me, are, you are seriously resorting to what you believe is pushing my buttons so that I'm taunted to give my best? Get the boys angry so they fight with momentum- well only Gon falls for that. Let's fight again. And this time use all your power" He let out smug.

Her gaze was intense blue, the corner of her mouth twitching "I can't"

"But you could on Greed Island, you know I saw you" Killua claimed defiant "With this weather we should enhance in more action, try me! Throw me stones! I bet I can handle more-

"No, you can't" She took a hand to her forehead, trying to relax her brow against the cold glove.

"I do! try me Biscuit, try me" Killua insisted.

Wow. In the echo of his voice Killua recognized the awfully familiar Gon –insistence.

He seriously spent too much time with the dude.

"Well" Killua raised his voice with defiance "Double intentions or not, you still came here, all the way to this huge expanse of snow. So fight me." He crossed his elbows in fighting stance

"...You said... you came to help me... " His voice had hesitated on the last.

"I am here to help you." She repeated neutrally. She exhaled and met his stare.

"So you are being tailed"

She saw how effectively she'd sliced the confident attitude. She was now perceptive as to how the boy was frozen. His stare had gone from charged to dead battery.

Killua inhaled briefly trying to articulate the excuses, the ones he'd formulated in his mind for times like these.

But this was Biscuit. He couldn't even begin to-

"What- Are you going to try to deny it with sweet talking? It slides off me young one. What I'm interested in is how did you from all let this happen?"

Driven to a corner and he felt the upcoming banned images- his vision glazed. He could not face her… he wasn't able to face her… to explain, to speak-

"Oh god. Wow. You truly believe it's the end of the world…” She murmured silently approaching
her student. "Aren't you going to react? Are you going to avoid eye contact forever?" She was circling him, her timbre sometimes so sweet was now dry, apathetic "Where are your defences Killua?" A hard expression.

The boy swallowed hard, his Adam apple bobbing.

Then he closed his eyes, and turned to leave in the most abrupt way

"...I guess here ends training..."

She appeared in front of him and detained him by the shoulder.

"You are not going anywhere yet. You were the one that called me here didn't you"

Well… actually Gon…She didn't know the seriousness of it all did she but-She- what did she know?

"...How" his throat was tight

"I've heard this story so many times! None of them know and you are in trouble. But you are too proud to ask for real help" She rolled her eyes "How can you hold such pride?! What, did you steal something?"

She rounded him

"Did you kill someone?" She inquired almost aggressively. The flash of the mauvines eyes ruled that one out "Well, aren't you wiser than this? Isn't this how you got into the spider's den back in Yorkshin? Let's not ask for help, let's get into the lion's mouth on our own, god isn't this how I found you and Gon about to be murdered out of ignorance on Greed Island?" Her words were unrelenting, her stare unyielding.

But Killua's gaze was empty, fixed on the ground ahead.

Biscuit completed the orbit around his student. "You are not children anymore"

There was a sudden sense of loss into that...that hurt...

"What I don't understand... is why Gon doesn't know" A comment almost to herself, but the boy brusquely turned

"Biscuit, don't you-"

"Don't you what, Killua?. Are you threatening me?"

He lowered his eyes immediately.

"I won't Killua. I don't even know in what problems you're in, and seriously I'm not interested in fights that don't concern me." She folded her arms "So, let's make the résumé. He or she is far more skilled than you in tracking… Well, that is no excuse for you to cower like that"

"Ugh" he couldn't help the silent groan. But the boy still was speech forbidden.

"So you were outnumbered? Tortured much? I'm sorry, but you know better than that. We are hunters, not runners. And anyway" Her severe voice lowered "Shouldn't you be used to that last much since childhood?" She kept the cold voice steady as she uttered cruel words like sprinkling salt. And she searched for signs on his expression. But he wasn't shaken.
… Yet…she’d achieved certain anger underneath the frozen stare. If she continued maybe he’d speak up.

"Why are you in the run Killua?"

"I see you spoke with Kurapica" He shook the bangs of his forehead and held her gaze. His eyes though were unreadable… "When? You have quite a tight schedule…"

"When you were sleeping." She spoke critical "He had strong reasons to speak with me before I arrived"

Killua looked at the sky. "You said I am being followed. Not that I was." There it was, the even monotone she’d tried to rear away. "Tell me if I heard wrong."

"You and Gon were being tracked. And then someone, for a fleeting second, was tracking me as I came here. I effectively derailed him. But you tell me if these are the same person Killua" She sighed "Or people"

She surely was influenced by Kurapica's story. He tried to ease on the adrenaline, he had to keep his stance collected.

"Biscuit—… right now…am I being tracked?" His voice was soft and tentative, trying to read into Biscuit expression. He did not care about the answer…he cared about the degree of knowledge of his trainee.

She could sense this. Each of them trying to pry further into each others motives. But she exhaled

"If you are being tracked right now? I don't know" She answered honestly. "You tell me Killua. Are you, right now, being tracked?"

He kept silent. Staring at the snow as if trying to melt it.

Biscuit's eyes softened "Very well. Killua, Tell me, in your wild run out, did you check for basics?"

He remained silent. She sighed. "He wasn't even tracking you with Nen, if that's what you're scared about. Did you use untraceable forms of motion?"

He looked up stern, his jaw clenched. "Yes"

"Did you eliminate all forms of GPS tracking, like your cellphone?"

"I did" he let out barely

"What about the other's cellphone"

"Kurapica took care of that without me asking"

"Very well…" She murmured "Killua… is there any chance that they might have put a tracking micro device on you or Gon's clothes?"

Killua was silent.

"According to what I was told, there wasn't enough time for them to do so. You were tortured…maybe someone implanted a tracking device under your skin... but the possibility is rare.
You would've noticed unless they'd knocked you down senseless so you wouldn't know...therefore it's discarded. Isn't it Killua?"

She kept on speaking but the incessant words began to slip into the white of a tunnel vision

"It would've required you not to notice. To place a tracking device in a position it will stay relatively fixed for some time, like the hems..." Her words blurred, images came violently—his knees felt weak, in the back of his mind her voice, how these devices were silent, satellite operated, how it wasn't likeable because Killua hadn't slipped to unconsciousness in front of the enemy, after all he had encountered them only once..."

Only after some seconds of her brainstorming spoken buzz did she realize her student was disquietly still. As if rooted into place. Bangs of his hair covered what seemed and edge of dismal to his expression. His face was ashen.

Her eyebrows rose skeptic "Killua. Seriously?"

His fists were clenched white... his gaze was lost. He wasn't listening to her it seemed, something he often did. She kept pacing.

"Don't tell me this, you already knew all that I said, that's also a basic! Where, oh tell me where did your professional skills go Killua!"

Her unrest didn't seem to wake him. She stopped to take him in. He'd detained all signs of acknowledgement a while ago in the conversation... This was the opposite of what she aimed... His...eyes...they were...

She exhaled. She raised her arms, turning, defeated.

"Go"

He vanished faster than what Biscuit sight could trace.

The crackling sounds of generators exploding tensed her shoulders. Dashing light phenomena came into vision across the sky for seconds. Then darkness fell heavily over all vicinities.

...Probably all high voltage power lines... and probably all the satellite signal towers on the perimeter, were dead.

She could see one by one, distant town lights on the faraway hills blown away like candles. They only left eerie shadows of rib-like trees and the deafening silence of snow.

And for a second, she saw, up the furthest power lines, his silhouette amidst sizzling circuits and sparks, raw torn cables on his hand. Against the intermittent white he was a black shadow, his strands of hair wild against the blizzard. Just as fast he was gone. The kind of speed that left the odd sensation of an after image, one you began to think hadn't existed on the first place at all.

Biscuit sighed. He was fast. He was intelligent. He was strong. Too strong. A deceptive nature...

There were deeper, much deeper problems in his fighting skills. It wasn't his fault. Running for your life made you a runner...

x.x.x
What if it has already happened?

Andree sat stunned.

Only when the silence amplified the words did the small boy hear himself. His face grew deadly ashen.

"Not to me" he added quickly "not to me-not, I meant-" The boy inhaled shaking his head.

The doctor sat with measured slowness in front of him. "Little one..." His hands splinting unconsciously.

"Not to you?" He spoke with gentleness

The boy shook his head strongly

"Are you sure child?"

He nodded once. Frozen.

"I..."

This boy would run. Andree interrupted him immediately

"You meant then that this happened to a friend?"

The boy felt confused. But catching the doctor's eyes helped him get the drift and he nodded. Once. Then vigorously.

"What happened with your friend?" Andree invited him to speak.

"... He…that" Giddiness hit him, making him almost unable to articulate.

Andree seemed to possess boundless patience as he waited for the boy to thread up the broken phrases.

The doctor tried to gather as much welcoming attention as he could in his expression-Not to say a word, only to stare at the boy, remember eye contact is vital, nod and nod again, appraising sounds to let the child know he is being heard- Eve whispered busily in his ear.

Internally though he was like... shit.

"... They…my friend… they made him" the boy swallowed "that… they made him that and… it-it happened… and… what…what if it happens?" The child stumbled with the question again in a whisper.

"Tell me, is this happening to a friend of yours?"

The boy took some moments before nodding. The man put his elbows on the table and crossed them, his expression dazed.

"I'm sorry to ask you so much, but it is important... Tell me... Has some adult asked 'sex of him' -like you said, have...you realized after what I told you that some adult …abused him?"

The boy kept silent. His gaze fixed in the floorboards. He nodded, speechless. He'd done so again and again. But this time the doctor took a hand to the bridge of his nose, his chest heavy, before
opening care giving eyes and raising the child's head

"Thank you for telling me this. And thank god you are telling me"

Andree swallowed

"You can guess this is a serious situation" The man though had softened his voice almost soothingly "it is Ok if you feel scared, but you are safe, trust me… and what you are doing now, speaking out, that is exactly what you should do. It's more than Ok for you to have doubts, and once again, I repeat you are doing the right thing by telling this to someone" He spoke vehemently, taking the small child hands on his own "I promise you are safe with me. And I promise you that there is nothing to be afraid of"

There were a million things to be afraid of. This was like promising on Santa coming to town. Consequences could be dire. But he would take the burden, whatever of it came. He would protect this child as far as he could, he would Eve, I will as you would.

And the first way was enabling him to speak…

"Your friend sure has luck to have you by his side, isn't it? Because now you'll be able to offer vital… help." The boy rose his gaze. His heart skipping substantial beats per second, but the man spoke with a steady voice

"Do you want to help your friend?"

"… Yes…" The boy eyes lowered. He was doing a very alien operation of mind which was thinking outside of himself imagining. If he had a friend… he sure would help him. He felt sad.

"...Bu-but I don't know h-how…what should I do…?"

"There's a serie of things that you must transmit to him, vital things he needs to know"

"I-I will" the boy nodded obediently.

Andree could observe he was still in shock...

"First of all and of utmost importance, you have to tell him it is not his fault."

The boys’ eyes widened confused.

"Yes, you must tell him it is not his fault. He won't believe you, so you must repeat and repeat it to him like a broken record, that by all means it is not his fault—"

The boy kept silent some instants. But then he shook timidly his head

"But my friend… maybe the adult didn't know. And he got confused and its really not that serious. Or maybe my friend got-"

"No" The man interrupted. As if with capital letters. The boy seemed to shrink in his seat and Andree realized it was easy to forget the age of his interlocutor...

"Hey" Andree's golden eyes sought him "You're doing great… don't be scared, you are doing nothing wrong. Here"

The doctor took the mug "Let's drink a bit of your chocolate, I bet you it's still warm"
"No..but...but what if…” he tried to sound collected and adult-like but he stuttered- "What if ..if it's just...sex and not a...abuse b-but a uhm, a game...or rules..",

"No. In none of those cases it is sex. It is still abuse and not half lessened on how grave it is by the fact."

The boy shook his head again as if the wrong laid in having not been able to explain himself.

"But...",

"Remember what to tell your friend.. he needs you to be strong or else he won't believe you. You must tell him it is wrong, really wrong. But that it's not his fault"

"B-but…” Killua hated to sound so scared. He held his breath to level his voice, because still his need to ask was stronger than anything

"No, but... maybe the adult is confused. He doesn't know and-" But Andree interrupted him with vigour.

"There is no adult that doesn't know this about sex and abuse. No one. Between an adult and a child there can't be sex"

Andree softened his voice.

"To turn into an adult means knowing all these things well, and believe me...every adult knows what child abuse is and every adult knows that abuse is wrong."

The child nodded, his gaze off focus. But then he looked up, his eyes still questioning

Andree exhaled "Even if the one confused is your friend ...it is not acceptable in any way for an adult to engage on this."

"Never?"

"Let's put it this way- If a child came to an adult and begged for sex ... No- even if the child knew the word abuse and asked for it to an adult 'Please, have sex with me' or something"- Andree ignored the pained flash in the violet eyes "Well even in that rare possibility, it would still, still be abuse. It still wouldn't be the child's fault- that adult would be a criminal. As criminal as any adult convicted of child abuse, one who is above all selfish. And that child is as any child who needs help"

The boy seemed mute. But he swallowed

"Maybe" He whispered biting his lip "Maybe my friend has something... wrong in him...something wrong in him that... makes the adult do this -"?

"No! oh please, no.." He repeated the last firm and clear. "No. You must tell your friend this. There is NOTHING wrong with him. Nothing. Someone is hurting him. And that someone will say... many things so that your friend believes it's his fault" His voice had lowered in anger "He might say it's his eyes, it's his mouth that makes him do this. Well, its a lie. You repeat him this again and again, there is nothing in your friend that's wrong, it's that adult that is abusing him. You must-"

But the boy was shaking his head. *As if in pain.*

"Can it be that maybe... it's not wrong always?" He seemed to question almost to himself. But
catching Andree's attention again, he seemed to shrink. His voice was just the mutter above the whisper "Maybe ...because...what if-if he's not a bad adult, he is a good adult, one that -takes care of my friend, and really doesn't know. Because he c-cares-

"No...no...no" The doctor inhaled slowly...his voice in an effort to be firm yet soothing "This adult knows...believe me... he knows its wrong. And even if this man seems to care for your friend...It... it would still be criminal. Even...even if the adult that does this to a child is a....mother, or a father, a sister or a brother..." Andree's voice was grazing such a low tone..."Even if it is someone the child loves..." And as he spoke he saw the light pooled in the violet iris, and Andree felt his throat tight, there, maybe imagined, maybe not, a flash of denial, fear-An anticipation of pain turned into a fierce gaze of distrust along a fierce drink of each word said in slow belief.

"Even if it is an adult loved by the child even then it is wrong and horrible of an adult to do... Tell your friend please, that whoever does this to a child, whoever is able to do this to a child, then he or she is not taking care of him. He might be loving but he is causing harm. Horrible harm. Even though it is hard to believe... that person does not love the child at all... since he's harming him and causing him terrible damage... it would only be selfish love, selfish ...possession."

That word made the boy blink startled. Andree tried the entire time to establish direct eye contact

"When an adult knows that what they'll do will hurt a child, in whatever realm, when the adult who was supposed to protect your friend-still, still hurts him... that is outrageously wrong, it is selfish, is not real love, it is abuse ... there is no word for that- " He was barely muttering under his breath. "No one who hurts a child... should be walking but in the cell of his prison"

The boy was staring at him lost, absorbing each word. He remembered the girl and the man in that room. It'd been wrong. Seeing it had felt wrong he said to himself. He remembered Brother rescuing him. He remembered Brother teaching him it all, teaching him about fighting stance, about hiding, about arteries, about venoms, training him with patience, - guilt- he seemed to ask little in return, like his shirt and kneel, and now it was wrong but he remembered the training tortures and how Brother was more patient than mother...How Brother was colder than Mother. How he'd wanted Brother to notice him so much he didn't know the name of what was drowning him-only later would he learn it was called guilt-

"Why... why is it so wrong? Its just... its just sex..." He felt his eyes stinging.

Andree took the boy's shoulder the gentlest he could "You must tell your friend that what they've done to him is not sex... you must tell him ...Ok?"

The boy remained silent unable to look up.

Andree exhaled. "I know it's difficult to understand... maybe you don't know but sex is something done between adults. And when both adults want it. If one doesn't feel ready or does not feel like having sex, he or she is free to refuse...and crossing this line and forcing to do sex to another adult without their consent is a grave grave offence. Did you know that? And that is also called abuse, since there is someone being harmed in disadvantage..."

The smaller one was deadly pale. He somehow understood, it was like speaking about strategy. He nodded, attentive, scared.

"Follow me slowly as you are able. Sex is always a choice taken freely. And like this sex is something enjoyable. However, when abuse happens, all of these notions that I'm teaching you... all this notions that are so so so important, get mixed up. Your friend will feel it's his fault when it is not. Your friend will think it is something he can put up with when he can't, when he shouldn't, when
The boy shook his head- "No… but maybe sometimes… sometimes" And he inhaled feeling out of breath "Sometimes he says it is not that bad and maybe it is not that bad..." His question was barely audible, he would never look up again, not that bad, not that bad but this man had to be wrong, he had to be wrong, but it was vital for him to know, he had to, he had to, he shook his head in a whip closing his eyes shut tight for a second.

Andree bit his lip, and there was a silence that the boy knew definite of how wrong he was. Shame-

"…What your friend says… tell him its normal. Actually all that you are saying…it is all completely normal for someone who is living abuse. Its nothing to be ashamed off… You know , when this kind of stuff happens…” Andree exhaled "Well normally it doesn't feel wrong… it might feel good" He murmured "The most normal is that your friend sometimes liked it…maybe he sought it…You must tell him that despite this illusion, what they are doing to him is still hurting him, and that it is still not his fault. It wasn't wrong for it to feel ’s good either...it's natural… But as all this happens, that child is being harmed in other ways…that are complex and grave"

This was so difficult. Seeing the boy like this... it was so difficult...

"Hey...just talking to me about ALL this which is huge, it just tells me how brave you are... Telling your friend will be easy after this. I really admire you, you are a brave child " Andree spoke trying to lift the child's gaze.

"Children usually don't know that there are different realms where one can harm another being. You can harm someone physically, like causing him pain right?"

The boy nodded faintly.

"Tell me, do you know some ways you can hurt another physically?"

The boy hesitated. His voice was barely audible "cutting, hitting, poisoning, freezing, burning…and many other ways."

So he had quite an inventory there… What would have Eve said?

"Good examples. Quite smart. And we don't do that to our friends or family because it would hurt, don't we?"

"Well, sexual abuse can do physical harm as well"

The boy nodded. This he understood… But for him that had never mattered much... physical harm. That was something he was taught to overlook.

"Then you have the realm of the mind" He tried to keep his voice dynamic and emphatical to rail the boy out of his own blank expression. He effectively was.

"...mind?"

"Yes. It means how you feel. If you are a happy child. One that feels alive and eager each day , and not one that feels threatened, or obliged to anything that is not for his own good. One that is not doubtful or sad, one that is not fearful or uncomfortable. No child should feel any of these ways for a prolonged time. You and your friend have the right to be happy"
He observed the beautiful violet eyes.

Andree continued "You see... As a child, you are just getting to know the world. So it should show you how worthy it is to live and thrive in it. You have the right to walk in it without feeling safe, you have the right not to be clouded by any other who might make you feel sad or uncomfortable. Or threatened. Or unworthy of love , unworthy of respect. Or fearful."

Andree opened his hands "And... abuse causes all that I named. That's why it is so terrible."

The boy seemed to be repeating the words he'd said, his brow knitted. Andree proceeded "You see...those are the critical wounds... they are just not visible"

The boy didn't lift his gaze. As if frozen... and bewildered. That didn't matter. How he felt? How he felt each day? that had never mattered. Andree tried to catch the boy's attention

"Can I tell you a secret?"

The boy was effectively derailed again. He looked at Andree. "Yes..." He nodded stunned

"Do you think you can keep it?"

"Yes I can" the boy looked down "If you keep mine...about my friend" He immediately added, quick in thought.

"I will... if you help him. I promise"

The boy nodded slowly.

"Like this" Andree took an invisible key , held it in front of his nose and swallowed boy had observed him mime the actions. And as if playing, the child took his own invisible key and swallowed it.

"When you speak to your friend, it is the other way round" And he mimed pulling out of his mouth with a thread the key.

He was far more pedagogic than Brother, really. But right now he couldn't think of Him... or of it all-of it all-...his feet dangled in anxiety.

"But you will keep my secret, right?" The boy asked again.

"I will"

"You promise?"

"I promise"

The boy hesitated "...What is your secret?"

Andree lowered his voice "Well... she never told anyone else. But Eve was a survivor of abuse" Andree paused.

"And she had to learn all this that I'm telling you the hard way. And yes, sometimes it was not bad at all. And sometimes it was the worst secret she had to keep. Eating her alive...it colored everything she did. It was still damaging her in ways she couldn't even grasp ...Like damaging her confidence in life, her happiness, her trust... But"
He looked directly into the violet eyes to make the emphasis "She got out safe and sound. When she asked for help the situation stopped. And when she was an adult she could enjoy of real sex and not what they'd done to her... She got out and so will your friend... And life does not stop in it, because there is so much more to live. But for this, your friend needs help so that the abuse stops. You must help him"

"... I want to...but..." His throat was locked up tight. He tried to steady himself with the table, feeling wrong-wrong-wrong. He realized Andree's hand hadn't moved from his shoulder.

On years to come he'd find the gesture either menacing or assuring. The double entendre became unable to unknit in his memory... The child's throat was growing tighter by the second but Andree spoke again.

"I'm sorry, I'm upsetting you. This topic is hard, and you are taking it really bravely. It is hard to speak about someone being hurt isn't it?" He spoke with empathy.

The child nodded vehement.

"Breathe soundly little boy."

The boy tried to take a long breath. But he found himself whispering, as if a secret

"...I... don't know how to help my friend" He looked up, his beautiful eyes seeking... He seemed about to cry and yet unable.

"Take a sip of the warm chocolate"

"but..."

"You'll feel better" His hands were guided to take big mug. But he didn't lift it... he just left it there, warming his hands.

"Are you hungry?"

The boy negated.

Andree waited for the boy to process it all. "Tell me, are you confused?"

"N-no... y-yes"

"What do you feel?"

"It" The boy trailed, but suddenly seemed to find a pearl of truth "It doesn't matter" He looked at Andree assenting, he had been taught this. Andree held his gaze, kind.

"It does. Tell me...how do you feel?"

The boy took time to gulp it through"...I-I feel... I'm..." The boy inhaled and closed his eyes "I'm sorry... I should have never told...It's not that bad I should have never." The boy shut his eyes tight. It was banned it was banned he knew he shouldn't have, this wasn't a nice game, it wasn't-

"You did the correct thing and don't ever doubt that" He heard as a far-off echoe, but Andree spoke with the strength of those golden eyes. "You did the right thing. Don't ever doubt that"

There was a long silence were he only stared at his hands as Andree moved closer his chair. "I don't want to see you sad...so I will change the topic of our conversation. okay?"
The boy seemed unresponsive.

"Sooooo tell me have you ever driven a car?"

The change of subject made the boy open his eyes. He still seemed shocked. Andree's face was serious yet kind, as always. The man's head tilted, truly wanting to know the answer and engaging the boy in doing so. The boy swallowed

"I think that yes.."

"Really? Like a real car? That'd be so amazing"

The boy nodded trying to collect himself. The lack in his chest told him he was failing miserably. But he tried. "I mean.. I haven't driven a car... can't drive by myself... I'm- I'm sorry!" He blinked feeling like a failure "Because my legs aren't long enough... but dad sometimes takes me to fly jets after training, and helps me...or Gotoh" He trailed, speaking so so softly Andree missed some words.

"Dad sits me on his lap and I'm in charge of the steering wheel and he's in charge of the gas pedals I don't reach... but that has only happened thrice... when I'm doing good... Next year I'm flying the jet on my own he says..." It was barely audible. "If I am good..."

"That sounds brilliant" Andree's eyebrow rose.. "You are going to fly a jet! Isn't it brilliant?" He waited for the boy to nod, and added "I have never been in a jet in my life"

"No?" the boy sounded amazed

"Nope!"

"It's...cool" The boy smiled.

"Tell me, do you like heights?"

The boy nodded, still shy "I...like them a lot lot..." He whispered.

"Take a bit of your chocolate. We'll work on what you'll say to your friend later...ok? Right now I can tell you though that I'm awesome at drawing jets"

As the child observed the clock, the doctor grabbed a gray notebook by the table and placed it in front of Killua. Then he clumsily searched for a pencil on every possible surface. He came up with two as he sat again.

"Look! Bet this is nice" Andree began sketching a simple airship with a boy inside.

"Here, take the other pen and compete with me. Let's see who draws it better"

The boy engaged immediately with a smile. He felt as if he was being tested but it was fun. He told himself he probably wasn't. He began to draw the kind of planes he knew. They never pulled out well though...

"Hey... that is really nicely drawn" Andree appreciated. Killua didn't think the same. "Try drawing someone inside"

He did. He tried drawing a steering wheel and behind a stick person.

"Soo, let's imagine the following. Let's say someone puts that boy in this jet. And this jet is the best jet there is"
"Cool" the boy whispered

"And they put him in the captains seat"

"Awesome!"

"But they put him there with no one else on board and no functioning controls"

"Oh" the boy nodded. He drew a belt around the stick man he'd drawn "He can't move because of this belt. So he can't reach the controls." He made it a thick belt.

"Ah very well! So he is flying and it is amazing, because he is able to see many things, like the small trees below and the tiny houses of the distant cities. He feels the butterflies in his stomach."

Killua drew small tiny trees under the jet and added to the story "He can see the huge mountain up from above. And far-off he can see the sea" He drew at a corner the waves of water. And with each line drawn he did, he tried, with real effort to put all the other words he'd heard that day inside his pocket, to bury them in the sand under the plane that he imagined he could fly.

"So…" Andree kept sketching over their shared drawing "This boy doesn't have control of the gas pedals- the brake pedal to decelerate or stop, or the pedal to accelerate." Andree drew exclamation marks all over "You see…the person who calculatedly put him in the spaceship has this control."

He drew a stick man with a black box in his hand on the ground.

"So, imagine he is standing outside, in the ground, a remote control in his hand. And you can't reach the pedals, but the man just pulls a button and you are soaring through the clouds."

He drew wind on the wings of the plane

"But that man as well, can stop all engines and let you fall." He drew the plane falling down, and the boy just observed concerned for the stick figure in free fall

But Andree, putting a hand on the drawing caught the child's gaze firmly

"This man won't mind putting the plane to crash down, he doesn't even mind about how the stick boy feels, if he's having fun, or if he's endangered"

The boy held his breath, making connections faster than expected. Andree sighed

"The man is only immersed in the thrill he feels to see the stick boy in the air helpless…"

As abrupt as the realization the paper was now a wrinkled ball in his fist. The sudden move to stand had even caught the child himself unprepared, almost loosing balance.

"Sorry. I-I...It's getting late… I should leave" The boy talked softly. Unwrinkling the paper and leaving it at the table, nervous. Andree had stood alarmed. He knew the reactions of the child were be erratic, unpredictable as the jump with his half stitched hand clawed-and he expected nonetheless after it all- and specially after this talk-

"Wait, child! First tell me if you are well. How's your hand"

"It's.."

The boy suddenly shook his head silently.
"Why do you care?" He snapped softly. His eyes searched for his bag, before realizing again it was underneath the table.

"Because I do... you must, please, you must help your friend" Andree took the boy's shoulders. But the boy tensed and loosened off grasp.

"...Why should I believe you.." The child held his head in defiance

"You have no reason to believe me" Andree squat to the boy's height "But I really do care for you. I want to help you".

The child stared at him... his big violet eyes.

"You need to help your friend..."

And Killua's head felt feverish and heavy.

"I...can't...I c- can't" he suddenly stuttered, his eyes closing "I'm sorry.. I can't"

His shoulder was taken again "Yes you can"

"You are lying! All you said are lies!"you 

"Why would I lie to you?"

The boy did not lift his gaze but Andree still saw the pain on those eyes "B-because y-ou ...." He exhaled trying to settle his balance

"Y-you might be a bad man. trying to spin off a story to take out information from me and my family" The child spoke the monotone as if repeating an overheard dialogue of sorts.

"I'm not doing that. You know I'm not doing that child. I just want to help you"

"How do I know you are not the bad man here" the boy protested in anger.

"Because I'm not. I only want to help you" There was urgency on Andree's tone that somehow scared him even more. But the boy ducked swiftly to take out his backpack.

"Killua wait- don't leave"

The boy heard his name and froze. And his eyes widened.

Andree realized immediately his mistake

"Wait- child-you must listen! I want to help you-please"

But he could see the child's expression dazed, in pain, as if he'd been struck.

Before he vanished in thin air.

Andree realized a window pane swung in delay. The backpack underneath the table was gone.

x.x.x

The threat was extended, the exchange clear. *Come with me, or I will meet them. You will come.* And it has always been there, the threat, but on these dark hours the time had finally come and he
wasn't ready, and he knew his eyes were the bone of the exposed fracture, one that aroused the intense black stare.

The mere possibility, only the mere possibility not to see them again hit him breathless like a bullet between his ribs. *Not to see them again.*

Illumi extended his hand.

"Come, Killua"

"What do you want!" The boy yelled as if burnt "What! Tell me! What do you want from me..." He felt breathless

Illumi paused, taking him in.

"I want you to kill again." There was hunger in his stare. "As you used to. I want you to become the heir"

Killua's heart seemed to stop entirely. Why would Illumi, why would He want- his vision blurred.

Unable to speak. Unable to move. Only the alarm system at the back of his mind amplifying each of his words. And then Illumi moved.

He took a step on the existing power lines. And he advanced. Oh, not like you would have wanted to imagine, not dangling, not anything like a tightrope walker... He walked as if menacingly weightless. As if a panther, as if walking on air. Closing their distance.

"No"

"Killua" He commanded in a whisper.

"I'm not going back" He held Illumi's gaze.

Illumi observed him. Apparently taking relish to this answer.

"You do not seem aware of the consequences"

"I'm warning you-"

"Do you plan to fight me brother?" Illumi tilted his head. His devious frame chiseled to used cruelty. *Because I would love to fight* his black smoldering eyes and Killua opened his mouth to deny, to refute, but no sound came, as the meaning in his dark eyes overcame him, as it echoed inside him, inside his mind endlessly whirling and doubling- *I trained you, I made you, I know your every move... I trained you, I made you, your every response... I created you and then I modeled you, I know you more than you will ever know yourself; I do, You're entirely...*

He shut his eyes tight. *Mine.*

Gon. Gon in the hostel, Gon with the lights out, Gon on his back as he slept, Gon waiting…

Killua opened his eyes. Illumi had taken another step and Killua's Nen activated and expanded, his elbows raised and crossed in defense.

Illumi aura expanded immediately in response.
"No" Killua took a step back "I won't fight you Illumi" He stated blankly, pale white.

"...Because...even if you wanted...you can't" Illumi muttered.

"You are wrong. I can" He held Illumi's stare "And I won't"

He could not recognize his voice "But dare you pursue this, Illumi, dare you" The rage flamed up his chest "You'll regret it. You'll regret it to your bones and marrow. You'll regret it to your soul if you have any" He breathed, his voice like flesh against gravel.

"And what will you do?" His voice was soft as gauze, his presence oppressive, overpowering

"Small Killua" He whispered "You have again the roles reverted...but...this time I will be thrilled observing you hit the realization" His tone dropped softly "To feast on your aftermath. I'm wise enough to let you choose Killua... so it is in your hands, not mine... Size your options, brother. Go on, threat me again and thrill me" He whispered "Or come with me" He paused barely "Or watch me reappear with one needle less in my hands. And even then you can choose to imagine who went first... was it Gon Freecs? Maybe Leorio Paladiknight? Or-

"NO" Killua groaned with rage "You don't scare me anymore, you don't have that power"

"Then you are misguided Killua" He took a step "Watch me leave"

"You won't" He spoke through clenched teeth.

"What makes you think so"

"That you haven't done it yet"

Illumi exhaled. "Until now" He turned with a speed that almost froze his heart.

"...Illumi" he paused "I'll tell"

A thick silence settled.

Killua repeated the words, as if they were air themselves

"...I will tell."

The dark onyx eyes were unreadable.

But then Illumi took a step closer and seized his words.

"Tell me Killua...what will you tell? What is there to tell?"

The flaw he aimed at- it was like an abrasion under scalding water. Killua bit his inner cheek, shutting it all off. He felt weak, but he closed his eyes and opened them to face him directly.

"I'll tell them all what you did. I'll tell them all you did and have done, I'll tell them everything, I'll tell them about that time when I was seven, I'll tell them how I ran away I'll tell them all, all, all" He breathed in.

His words opened a dark almost visible trench.

"You won't. " Illumi's voice didn't even rise as if a suggestion- they rather twisted as an affirmation of reality... an unyielding command of subduance of will.
Killua swallowed hard- Gon was waiting at the refuge- "I honestly don't care if you believe me, Illumi" his voice brazen "But dare you approach me or my friends again, dare you ever come near them, and I will speak" he raised his head "I'll tell Silva all. I'll tell him everything. And I won't save any word for the record. I get no honour? Great, I get no shame, I don't care" He spat the words, his mouth was dry. "And he will believe me. You know that he will"

The word Silva had turned in his tongue... but even though he couldn't call him so, even though he hadn't been able to say the word 'father' in that phrase, or hadn't done so in years, even so, just his name steadied him on place. Just the thought of him held him together...He would tell.

He would.

"Go ahead and try me Illumi. I will"

Illumi observed him ... His eyes unreadable. The silence seemed to expand beyond reason or nature.

And then it happened… A horror-like realization of what seemed the faint shadow of a smirk in the corner of his lip. As fast as a thought it was gone. Illumi's head rose to look west.

"Very well"

And as quick as the night setting in, he was gone.

Illumi was gone.

.

..

...

Killua waited for seconds, and seconds, expectant. This was not the end. This was not it. It couldn't be. He waited minutes and minutes, chasing one that could carry away his image.

His fingers touched his own lips, as if able to sense physically the words he'd spoken in disbelief. But as seconds placed flakes on his lashes he realized he was numb.

Inside out.

x.x.x

Small white wisps kept falling like crystal risky dices. All sound were muffled, except for that of her heavy boots sinking in the snow and the rustle of her dress sweeping the white surface.

She'd been walking her way back calmly, taking amiably the scenery after tending her own business callings. She kept warming from time to time her hands against her lips. That's when her line of vision picked up a strange figure interred in the snow. Fallen. And buried deep, the shape of the body cut out of the in the smooth white field.

She approached the person to observe in silence. Flakes like white powder covered his shoulders and back. He just kept breathing soundly, lying on his stomach, his arms and legs spread, half interred in snowfall. In this position Killua seemed to have been resting forever. A minute went by before the boy showed any sign of life. He slowly turned his cheek to her side as if picking her scent.

"…Hi...", the muffled sound greeted her. Biscuit observed his nape.
"Don't tell me you were sleeping"

"Mmm…"

She observed him.

"Wake up"

"Mmm no…"

"Wake up. It's a command. Or else 300 pushups upside down"

The boy groaned faintly.

"…I'm not going to freeze to death. Trust me"

A gloved hand posed over his shoulder. "I want you to walk with me"

The boy exhaled. His arms slowly took the weight of his body, as he rose. Snow fell from his shoulders.

He shook the snow away, his hands immediately finding the comfort of the muff in his anorak. And he observed the landscape. All was exactly as it'd been two hours before: Snow had taken the world.

"Killua… we need to speak-" She trailed.

"Oh boy, I should throw you that line …"

"What?"

He observed Biscuit's big-blue-demanding eyes and her small pouted mouth. He almost smirked.

"Nevermind"

"Killua, I came all the way here for you, I find you interred in snow after wiping off any form of light, and now you don't speak to me?"

She crossed her arms frustrated.

"Let's just walk Biscuit"

"you don't get to 'Let's just walk' me Killua!"

"you won't like it …" He shrugged stretching himself.

Biscuit was furious "Killua, it's me that gets to evaluate whether it will suit me or not!"

The boy listened with thoughtful eyes… and slowly he seemed to adopt an expression of resolution "…Ok…This might be important"

Biscuit schooled her expression to a serious attentive one, looking right up his pupil. Up…she sighed.

"Well, you know that I just crashed all the power lines on the vicinity…"

"Yes"

"Well, I had the deep, profound realization" His gaze was intense "that you are more than fifty"
"...What?"

"Well yeah... I just hit on an online article some few months ago on records and there was you and your name on an old newspaper... Exactly the same of course, no offense intended" he raised his hands. "Although maybe a few lines of expression..."

"IS THIS SERIOUSLY OUR TOPIC OF CONVERSATION?"

"Power lines" he interrupted. "Began to be used broadly around the sixties... So you were born along with them if I'm not mistaken... am I right?" but he recanted. "Well, no. I'm sorry, you're probably the one who should answer my guesses but... I think I can bet on that you saw news in black and white" he paused. "I mean, if you go calculating..."

He saw those big eyes squinting, fury progressively darkening them.

"Whoah, wait!" with calculated wonder he stopped dramatically. "Biscuit, you actually saw the birth of Internet!"

She reacted swifter than a wasp, but he still saw it in slow mode, the hurt ego flaming her eyes and swinging her hair as her hand closed in a fist.

He barely dodged her punch attack. He recovered his balance, and one second later he was breathless and holding his guts, down with one of her precise strikes to the back, her gloved hands raised. As his mind locked the pain, his body was head-on in attack, already freestyle kicking her. She was deadly fast but he actually caught her on the calf and almost got her off her feet. He ducked, barely free of what would have been a sure purple eye. He turned excited, sparks lit between his fingers.

Biscuit eyes widened. And before he knew it, he saw black, and fell on his stomach on the snow.

A punch like an ejecting hard stone had hit the base of his skull. He heard his own laughter, his shoulders against the ice. He was slowly recovering vision.

"First you hoist me up, then you punch me down..." He spoke out of breath.

"You got what you deserved"

"Is this what I get for telling the truth Sensei?" he said, stretching against the snowy ground. "I mean... you asked"

"Beware Killua, or I'll stomp you with my boots" Her expression was fury... and dead serious.

"I told you, you wouldn't like it" Killua smiled devious as he stood again. She inhaled air as if trying to calm the flush in her cheeks.

"Great Killua! Just great!" she paced. "Now tell me we just lost five minutes of our life over you being a jerk!"

"Uhm... in your perspective. In mine, I got back the five minutes you stole Gon into the kitchen and told him your secret plans"

She stopped on place.

"What! Is that this all is about?"
"I'm loyal. I haven't told Gon about your age."

"You were going to use electricity on me" Biscuit spoke with a cold stare,

"I..." he was left short of words "It was half a non-thought reaction..." He smiled apologetical "My conscious part totally processed you were never going to get hit or caught by me. You are a hundred leagues superior than me" He nodded earnestly

Biscuit rolled her eyes "Walk" She folded her elbows "And yes. No running or trotting. You are punished. Walk"

Damn. They were so far...

"I deserve an explanation. What did you tell Gon?" He continued, beginning their way back home.

Biscuit paused to exhale.

"...All this ruse to shift my attention... We both are skilled liars aren't we? Want to hear it? Well, tit for tat. " She still seemed quite vexed.

Killua looked at her strangely...and looked down at the snow, pensive "Yes...we both are skilled liars..."

The silver haired boy shook his head and spoke of getting back before they froze to death. Suddenly giving up the subject. Nonchalant façade Biscuit took note. He lead the march, silent. Biscuit followed, her lips tight, observant.

He was the one guiding her back to the town, to their respective hostel. So he was really avoiding talk, wasn't he. She observed the dim way ahead.

"I guess Killua you sort of caught on Gon because a liar knows another liar best" She tried to engage in conversation.

"What do you want from me?" His voice was calm and collected, as he looked ahead. Nothing in his posture, pace or voice showed any sign of worry.

It chilled her. It was too close to her memories of kidnap negotiating tactics. The Zoldyck tone.

She sighed placing feelings in the correct frame...

"So?" Killua defied her.

Biscuit warmed her hands against her lips. It was always a challenge to deal with Killua.

"What do I want from you? Well Killua... I want you to speak" She exhaled "Not lie. Not ommit. Speak"

Killua shrugged with a faint smirk "How vague."

"s you won't?"

"I don't even know what you mean" He smiled faintly.

"is that what you're going to say? Really"

"Uhm.. yeah"
"Very well"

The spread of silence between them slowly covered the entire landscape, a blind-end stretched unto the horizon. Only the heavy sound of their boots.

They walked for so long. The trail of their steps distended seconds, then minutes, a blind successions soon leading to the oblivion of words said. White gave way to color blindness. They were only left with the sound of their breathing.

But as the first town lights rose ahead she began to increase the pace to strides. Killua stopped on his tracks.

"Its not that way. Its east" He spoke gently.

"Are you sure? You may be lying" She let out bothered.

Killua rolled his eyes. "You know,you are actually right. I am lying. It's not east. You just walk straight on, we'll meet at the hostel" He'd walked away.

She had to catch up

"Well well, ok, so you are a liar and who am I to judge aint I-that's your position?"

A turn of his head, with a playful look on his amazing violet eyes acknowledged her last.

A secret to agreeing teaching the brat was locked in the image of those eyes. When she took her time for appreciation, Biscuit became enthralled by the amethyst magnet in them. She enjoyed them as much as Gon's honey ones. They were beautiful, the spirit hosting those gazes…they were an entire world.

She was obsessed with puzzles and their missing pieces, with diamonds and their million cut-out faces… Heavens, she was a goddess at candy-crush even.

And so she observed Killua.

"Now…are you sure you don't want to say anything…anything at all?"

She paused. "It is actually your last chance…I won't ask again, so think twice. You said east, right? Oh, and by the way, I'm asking Kurapica about it. I mean, being left without a way to charge my phone, that credits for an explanation"

Killua took a mouthful of air. He nodded silently, and proceeded to walk again by her side. Despair had crossed his eyes before he schooled his expression. But one step on the snow, two steps... and he'd stopped on his tracks.

Biscuit turned to face him, but he'd taken his hand the bridge of his nose, as if thinking hard.

She waited patiently. Until Killua exhaled. He looked up to the skies, without facing her.

"...Uhm ok…." He sighed. "A truth…to...speak" He swallowed "Well… its odd but…" His voice fell two tones down in graveness… "I guess...I ...need help"

He squared his shoulders and proceeded with their walk. Only his voice had revealed something fragile.

"What….is it?"
There was a considerable amount of silence before he closed his eyes, and schooled his features again into a playful stare. So devious, so changing in colour as a river against the hues of twilight… so unpredictable, as he spoke

"You don't have to help me for free, I hate pity. We both are creatures of exchanges as well, aren't we Biscuit?" She was observing him stunned only to stumble with the teen's half-smile.

"We are..."

"...I was thinking… you could do well with an owing- Zoldick- ace under your sleeve..."

"Are you serious?"

"Accept this please madame" He extended an imaginary card in his hand as an offer.

"This card certifies your right to claim use of an indebted Zoldick whenever you want, with all the privileges this means. The card comes with Mafia contacts and hunter skills, a deadly aftername, electric conduction and electric insulation, and no questions in regards to any operation. Or in regards to any bodily form you wish to take-Ow"

His foot had been stomped by her boot.

"An indebted Zoldick-of all trades under my sleeve uh?" She commented as if appreciating from head to toe the convenience of the contract. In truth...appalled. He was really trying, desperately trying to protect whatever he was exposing when he'd asked for help...

Her fine eyebrows crossed. "Why would you be in need of help? You are quite resourceful"

Killua chuckled "am I" There was a darkness to his tone.

"Yes. You and Gon are very resourceful. And" She rose her finger "A diverse opinion is a frontal attack to my training abilities" The boy smiled. He'd been about to yell a number when that finger rose. She was a good trainee...the best...

...They would be fine...

"Very well. I will help you under your conditions" She stopped and extended her hands, to seal a deal. He turned his head with surprise "Really?" He seemed relieved.

"So you need my help. What do you need?"

There was a thick silence. The teen in front of her seemed to be struggling with his words.

"Would you Biscuit..." He breathed in "Uhm...Take us... away"

The pained violet gaze stunned her.

"Away?"

"Me... and...Gon...and Leorio and Kurapica... my... friends... take us away from here... somewhere far... and lost... no trackers. Ha"

"so you're desperate?"

"no, no. Just foresighted"
Away... uh?

"Very well. Ill offer you the help you need. But I'll only if I do have that imaginary Zoldick card"

"Here it is" He knelt like a gentleman offering a ring.

"And... another condition" Biscuit added and observed attentive. He hid well the anxiety

"I'll help you.." she paused "If you fast-speed us back"

She could see respite easing his features, softening the cold gaze. He bit his lip, the corner of his mouth curved up ever so slightly. Oh, he would speak...She would make him speak.

"I can take us back. But the way is slightly awkward"

"As if I care"

x.x.x

Killua honestly didn't know when had he learned to play in snow... There seemed to be an old memory, at the tip of his mouth that couldn't be formed. Its after taste somehow dyed all the landscape with the amber light, as if some fond memory long gone still remained.

Well...It all amounted to watching Gon's face as he slid down a hill outside town which was priceless...

From the candlelit houses in town, they took icicle shards that tasted like water and dust. Fencing up the roofs with them suddenly turned fun and tricky as you could fall and they did fall. Gon was better at enhancing because of his Nen Type so he kept scoring points. Killua though was faster and deadlier. He struck and you were dead three meters down.

Meanwhile, people seemed to have vanished from the cold into the warmth of their houses, and the streets were empty. Lonely lamp posts powered by gas that remained from before the war had been lit, and were now saving the city from the general blackout. The few pubs in street corners were the only thing open, with green eyed barmen on their own at the stand, a few wee fellows gambling, some laughter forgotten on the patted snow.

The first time Killua taught Gon to slide downhill, he chose the highest and steepest fall. They both sat on one trashing bag, him crossing his arms around Gon as a seat belt, his knee bent as a brake.

"Three! Two! GO!" And the world ran before Gon's eyes in rapture, and he heard Killua's laughter on his neck, and in secret he felt such rush of joy he could not measure.

When they were back to the old tiled roof of their own hostel, watching the snowy night in wonder, Gon threw his back against the damp rooftop to stare up above as they always did. It has ceased to snow and stars were showing up, distant, cold and beautiful.

"Here, drink this"

Gon turned his head. Killua had taken from inside his pocket a small flask with that vampy grin of his.

"What is that?" Gon took it in his hand sniffing it.

"I borrowed from Leorio"
"Borrowed" Gon laughed

"Well yeah…technically I'm giving the flask back… empty which is something good for him."
Killua replied contended. And then he spoke with mimicked class "It's amaretto"

"Amaretto" Gon repeated.

"It's a sweet almond flavoured liquor. It's really nice…" The silver haired boy chuckled. He stretched himself and turned smoothly his head, with a guess-what expression that Gon immediately caught.

"What?"

"Leorio told me that as a child, he once played outside in the snow until his hands turned blue. His family was poor and it was rare for it to snow, so he had no mittens or scarf to buy. His mother was stitching some, but on the meantime, he gave Leorio one cap of amaretto each time his hands turned blue. They had a bottle stocked away since from their late grandfather it seems…" He spoke, turning the beautiful violet stare with curiosity at the sky.

"He told you all that?" Gon asked.

"Yeah… when he was tending me and I had a fever… He probably thought I wasn't listening" He smirked. Killua's eyes had seemed anxious all night. But they memory seemed to relax his shoulder blades, certain fondness in his whisper. "That old man spoke and spoke endlessly as he treated me… as if he really was concerned!"

Gon thought on how he hadn't been there…
At the lack of words he found himself thinking of his doctor friend… "…There are so many things I don't know about Leorio…there's even a lot I don't know about Kurapica…" He spoke aloud almost sad. "Even about Biscuit"

"You don't want to know about Biscuit"

At the silence specifying clarification he just added "It's almost her signature not to reveal her true nature"

*Right guys?*

"But one should know their friends well. I mean, I don't even know what's Leorio's last name! Or Kurapica-

"PaladiKnight" Killua voice was a sudden whisper.

"What?"

"... That's Leorio's last name it seems… Kurapica...I don't..." Killua didn't add any further… In a sudden daze…his eyes fixed far on his own patch of night sky.

Gon hesitated "I sometimes don't even know much about you…"

Killua head swayed his head to meet Gon's "Do you think so?"

"Yeah…" Gon looked down

"...Well… you know all the important parts." He found fondness in Killua's eyes…before he looked down.
He began stuffing out the snow from the sleeves in his anorak, where it was freezing his wrists… He was thoughtful as he spoke aloud.

"Gon… Biscuit… she… wanted you on a mission that involved your father…isn't it?"

There was a silence as Killua peeked at Gon's expression. His gaze rested on the horizon. Wistful eyes like the sails of faraway sea vessels.

But, his head eventually rose to meet Killua. "I honestly don't know. I stopped Biscuit before she could tell me anything." He smiled humbly "… Because we are going to Whale Island."

Killua took that in. He frowned "Gon, we can deviate"

"No. We are going to Whale Island." He looked at Killua vexed "We are! Whether you like it or not"

"Do you hear yourself? You're a loud stern goat" He chuckled. But then Killua's violet gaze sought him with insistence "Gon...you must focus on your mission. On your life quest. The reason why you became a hunter... And you don't need me to tell you this"... Or to hold you back...

Gon did not blink "I am. Right now I'm doing exactly what I want"

Killua rolled his eyes "No you are not! You're a lily- liver-sucker that's just being too-" And he stumbled with the word… "Too kind-hearted. Nothing new on that"

"I'm not! I'm being selfish. I want to go to Whale Island and your coming."

"Gon listen, please" Killua's hands rose. "There is no reason to go to your homeland unless you miss Mito counting backwards for us to do our beds"

"There are reasons Killua, don't go on denial mode." Gon abruptly snapped. "I am doing what I need right now which is to get you to Whale Island. You must believe me. And I am confident Biscuit will help me in the future with what I want"

"But chances may not-" He replied fast but Gon interrupted him.

"It's just for some time, I promise Killu. It really is the best place. On Whale Island there aren't any satellite posts at all, and my house doesn't have power lines! All light works on Eolic energy." He insisted "It is the best place not to be followed"

...Killua looked aghast. He'd been sitting, his elbows on his knees, when his hands covered his face. Gon observed him sad. The boy then uncurled to fall on his back, stunned. Gon fell on his back too. He stared at Killua concerned. He dared not speak or move.

Killua looked regretful as he turned his gaze on the boy for a second. But then his eyes widened "Gon, your lips are almost blue"

"Your's too"

"Your nose too"

Gon held his gaze. Killua sighed… He opened, then closed, then opened his mouth again.

"I'm…sorry" his voice was a whisper. "I'm…-

"I'm not." Gon stated.
There was a silence. Killua stared at the skies… If he closed his eyes for just one second, he would lose it. Gon stared at him resolute...

"Killua…I'm happy when I'm with you"

...

Killua took a palm to his eyes. He wasn't able to cry… so he found himself almost laughing. He inhaled air sharply "Gon...I went ahead…and…asked Biscuit for help. So that you weren't forced to part ways with her… She'll…she'll take us some place safe. And we can train… and you can do what you really need to do …"

"Really?!!"

Killua nodded. He tried to focus on the warmth of the idea of them anticipated always the other's move- instead of the stinging fracture inside his mind. But Gon's eyes seemed to pool the faint light of the stars easing his chest.

"Wait. You asked biscuit for help"

"Yup"

"WOW! I bet-cha she wanted something in return"

"I'm a deft speaker when negotiating"

"But do the guys know?"

"Probably Biscuit is telling them right now… So she'll take us far. You don't have to worry" He openly stared at the honey eyes some seconds.

"But..."

"Come" Killua tilted his head raising the flask "Let us cheer! Somewhere I believe they are celebrating New Year"

"..." At Gon's hesitance, Killua drank first, quite eager.

"Nice!" He smacked his lips, his eyes lit like those of a cat. Gon took the flask and drank. He choked and coughed, and he half laughed as he still choked."It burns!" he took another sip "It's sweet! And it burns!"

Killua took the flask again to his mouth. He turned his head to meet the honey colour. "Cheers"

"Cheers!"

...

"...Gon…” Killua trailed in almost a whisper "Thank you" He tilted his smile…One of those scarce that he loved so much. There was this silence. His friend had probably coiled again into his thoughts, but Gon kept still, staring at the violet dreamy eyes...

*No Killua*

*You...you don't know what I'm capable of for you so…*
...Thank you… thank you for being my friend.

x.x.x
You could see him standing at the edge of the cliff, his slender built against the sky. Gon observed him from afar. His pale arms were slightly open as if he was about to fly, his own height tipped forward. Gon couldn't tell because of the distance, but he imagined Killua had closed his eyes.

The raven was humming. Inside his mind and out there in the sky floated a beautiful hue of blue, so unlike the bleak skies of the past snow. He could see the tall blue mountains, the blue riffs and wuthering heights and Killua at its center, standstill.

The silver-haired boy inhaled the cold air. The breeze softly swayed the foliage of the woods and caressed his skin, lifting his head. Barefoot, he could feel the warmth of the sun bathed stone. At the edge, he had the view of the entire river that slowly unravelled through the blue valley.

He couldn't see Gon.

That only meant Gon was behind him.

"What are you waiting for!"

He turned his head, to catch Gon running towards him, still a distance away.

Killua always won the race.

Halfway through his ran, Gon stopped on his tracks and took off his clothes- his mind spontaneously planning a perfect dive from that cliff.

"GON I WON" Killua voiced out- but an audacious Gon ran towards him, sweeping the air with his arms open, with the momentum of a bull- probably harboring the intention to push him off the edge.

Oh, and only in briefs

"Why the hell would you…” Killua mumbled, as he moved a step at the last second to dodge his friend. Gon did not hesitate at the setback to take momentum. He jumped, his extended arms aligning in front of him. For a second, it was his body, arched against the sun. Then the fast speeding fall. The endless high high high fall. The thunderous splash. Gon disappearing under water.

Killua observed.

Then he shook his head. No. Really, No-oh. He refused to worry. He peered down the cliff, encountering his water speckled reflection from far off… One second.

Five seconds.

Ten seconds.

Two minutes.
With a loud splash the raven reappeared. "Caught ya!" he voiced up, a sly smile under bright eyes and black hair dripping.

"No you didn't!" Killua yelled back

"I could have stayed underwater nine entire minutes! I'm just too kind" Gon called floating on his back. *Yeah and the thought made him sick.*

"What are you waiting for?"

Killua looked everywhere. Gon was so carefree... He'd never met someone as daringly crazy...

The river was so wide and calm it could pass off as a lagoon for the inexpert eye.

He had experimented with heights on a large variety of situations but he had never dived from such a great height onto a river without... supervision of any kind as he had as a child. *That thrilled him.*

The effort lay in slipping off his clothes- but he did, he shrugged them off and jumped.

He fell through the air. It did not matter, he'd always had the feeling he'd died once before in his life and woken. He was flying, he was falling, he was tumbling to the earth. Before the arch described sent him underwater mere meters away from the shore- the splash, the shocking cold and world spinning, his rise, a breath that seemed like the first. The temperature and the high drop inevitably made you giggle. And they could have crushed their skulls but it didn't matter, did it? Because they liked the danger. Biscuit said that one day they would die out of their recklessness. Maybe they would.

In a swirl of water and open arms Gon spun lazily

"THIS-IS-SO-GREAT!" he hurrayed. An avid Killua called his attention

"Let's do it again"

"Now!" Gon finished his sentence "Let's jump together this time" The raven peeked at Killua greedily "...and backwards"

"Done" Killua answered keen.

"At the count of three, up the cliff" And there was a particular hunger in Gon's gaze. One mirrored on his friend.

"One"

They stared at each other with resolve, unblinking.

"Two"

For an instant-just a sparing second- Gon took in his gaze. One Killua was probably unaware of. A rich, violet, enthralling gaze, firmly set on Gon. Strong, unyielding yet warm, eyes like sapphires, eyes like an ocean, eyes like a steadfast wire for the rest of sparrows, eyes cast unto the horizon, eyes like home. The images crossed his head as he stared -without blinking- into those eyes.

It was probably because of this that Gon heard number three in delay. He cursed as he hurried behind his friend. But Killua was already running up the cliff, defying gravity, at super speed. Gon, a person mostly fueled by challenges, managed to arrive only one second later. And they looked at each other with shy thirst in their expressions. They took position, relaxed their arms, look to each
other again. And then they relaxed their bodies, falling 1 backwards.

It thrilled them beyond comprehension. They dived till they lost count.

At a moment, still panting in their frenzy, Gon swam towards Killua reminding him he'd been the one to win their first race that day. Their first winning line was the river no? So he'd dived first and won. In consequence, Killua would have to do as Gon said.

Of course Killua wasn't about to; he was the one that won. They had set the limit at the cliff-you little piece-of-Freecs.

Then came the usual negation of a middle ground that spurred a 'friendly' wrestle. Soon evolving into playfully murderous.

Achingly murderous.

In a foul move, an underwater Gon pulled down Killua's briefs. At the moment Killua felt so shocked he elbow-punched Gon on the nose with all his strength. Gon looked at him, with a horrible nosebleed and a goofy smile as he threw them into the air.

"I hate when you turn to stuff like –ugh" Killua didn't stay but dived already tackling Gon underwater- Now the fight became on evening the bets, and as Gon had wanted, this time Killua was really angry. It was crazy until with a kick and a turn the boy swiftly pulled the enemy's underpants. He saw red tint in the water, from Gon's nose before the image of a tanned arm and a punch threw him underwater, stinging cold, and Killua's lip was bleeding.

He did not like the taste of his own blood. So this was war.

Both assumed an attacking stance in front of the other...

Given five minutes they'd discovered Nen underwater.

They should've totally discovered that before.

Biscuit arrived in the midst of some messy and probably epic half underwater battle, one quite unprecedented in that tranquil scenery.

She sighed loudly and stood there until her presence was acknowledged. Soon enough one of them froze, the other spoke surprised "Biscuit!" and both became sufficiently conscious of having the right half of their bodies underwater.

"Free time's up" she said neutrally, without commenting on the scene.

But they were too ravenous by this moment, and quite as she anticipated, a fast -as -a- snake Gon, reappeared at the banks of the river, pulling Biscuit down by her dress.

Biscuit stared at Gon's intent, smiling with sweet blue eyes. Before kicking Gon with her boot on his face.

"Hey!" Killua protested but an arch of her fine copper eyebrow, one finger lifted and she had them screaming numbers.

"Very well. Now get outside you two. We have to continue"

They did not move as if frozen. She folded her arms, not used to not being obeyed. But in her situation scan she caught Killua's tortured expression. She quickly understood and turned facing the
woods "I'll meet you in five minutes at camp. Do not dare to be late or I'll use your bodily fat and entrails to light the fire tonight"

Biscuit had left before Gon could protest "We train all day! We deserve rest!"

There was a silence where Killua just let himself drown underwater. Beneath the surface he heard something akin to "unfair!"

Gon felt injustice. Killua felt naked. He sighed and rose.

"Gon…if you want to get into the mission-

"I know, I know." Gon stated obstinate, he did not need memos. His voice lowered "I know. I'll train whatever is necessary" he mumbled under his breath. He knew Killua observed him, so he forced an amiable grin before diving as if a shrug.

Yup. Gon tried to hide things as well. Those words, words he'd said so many times since he left Whale Island… They never ceased to come with an intense need, overwhelming need to get stronger, to get better. It was so potent that giving himself respite sometimes came with a tidal wave of self-imposed shame.

His arm was taken.

"Hey"

Gon turned, his black hair dripping, his nose bleeding.

"Do not doubt we will get the mission."

Gon looked up at him. He could not formulate a thought fast enough before Killua smiled warmly, turned, climbed off water. Stretching. Briefs on.

He was fast.

"Do you really think so Killu?"

"Yup"

The silver-haired boy let himself fall on his back with grace, over the grass under the sun. He closed his eyes contended, obviously defying Biscuit's demand. Like this he lifted his head a little.

"If you want Gon we can train in the city. It' no problem. We can ride motorbikes at night. I'll follow you"

Gon felt his own face beaming faintly. Then he shook his head with determination "No. If Biscuit says here it's safe to train, then here it is where we are training" he answered. He received his shorts on his face.

"You gotta work on your reflexes."

Killua looked at the skies. Gon had laughed out words, and now he was running towards Biscuit, to arrive first. The silver-haired boy, sighed. Some seconds later of hustling and he was fully clothed. He decided to walk behind, slowly, barefoot, delighting on the grass under his feet. Each step straightened his spine a little and raised him from the ground, each step sprang a word in his mind to the sun.
I feel free. Step
…Killua reflected…
Safe…
Step.
I feel...
Step.
So safe.
Step.
I feel- Step-safe-step... and free... step. So free... Gon-step-I feel you're safe- And he hadn't noticed he was running, running fast, aiming at the dot Gon had become in the distance.

I'm also training to get stronger Gon.

The breeze hit the blue foliage mightier and mightier- and as Killua gained speed, his thoughts seemed to converge at the cross of all the winds, because by Gon's side his mind ceased speech, it did! and instead it flew away so high- And there, above it all, the four points of the compass rose became three, north and south, and the confines of the universe did not confine him, but unleashed him , and meaning and its absence were completed with one of his smiles, the kind that were like the first dawn on earth.

*.*.*.*.*

Run.
Run.
Run.

Running to the beat-beat of hammering thoughts.

Running to complete his mission.

He had to. And the small child could be seen dashing through the damp forests of Kukulu. The foliage shivered at the mercy of an intermittent cold wind, tiny water drops falling slowly.

Run- through the mist he went- because he had to complete this mission- Father, I have to complete my mission, he had too, really, he would not see the face of any of them, Mother, Father, Grandpa and -and Him-

That had been his first thought that day, it'd been that small operation equated on his head that took him away to the cities on his own as he'd never done before, he had to complete this mission. But all the while he saw as if removed from his body how his small hands rested on the stone, his entire weight leaned on that sole contact. The first of the seven gates was opening.

He refused to acknowledge he'd returned, he just kept on running beyond his lung's capacity. He could barely ask himself for motives, his feet still ran, his knees dirty, I have to, I have to, and the drops sprinkling from his hair to his nose bothered him. He abruptly stopped, and decided to take his
shoes off to go faster. He must have looked funny hopping on his right bare feet as he took his left sneaker.

But then his heart froze. He heard it.

In the distance, in the far distance, his name.

Nanny was calling him.

...It hurt.

He closed his eyes. He ran wildly in the opposite direction.

A hand ran to his chest. It hurt. Now...he could not see her. Ever...again-and it hurt so bad. He... no there was no avoiding it, he choked because he held a knowledge that could not raise his eyes again, and he was just dodging the thought not to mourn the loss, because he would not see her again.

It hurt- it only set him running and running– and his mind was empty- empty –empty-empty as when he killed-chillingly empty.

When, exactly, had he stepped into the mansion was a daze. He should not be here, he could not be here and each sharp intake told him so, because his running steps were rampant echoes up the walls, because the dim light and his exhaustion drew the contours of the halls blurry-Because he wasn't supposed to be here, no, he had to complete his mission. Forget everything. Set it all right. Father...Father... Father... But he was failing, nothing drove him-nothing- nothing, and he only went farther and farther and farther away from what he needed to do, because he was supposed to fix it all, the mission... But unexpectedly, as he skipped staircases he recognized the distinct need to aim for his bedroom, for his bed, for his underbed.

He kept running feeling feverish, because his mind could be empty, but the words he'd heard that evening escaped from his memory into the world, scratching corners and creaking floorboards, casting shadows and contrasts to each surface, making every corner unfamiliar -and his mind was losing bearings and tumbling into dead-end streets and the image of that the bad man and him down the alleyway,and the color of Andree's eyes as he spoke the words that clawed their way out - and his body would not stop running as if in a compass of his own, no words but dread placing reality. He ran and ran.

He breathed and sweat and ran.

Run.

Run.

Run.

Until he stopped brusquely. Finally.

Yes. He'd stopped for sure. His breathing was hard. His heart fluttered like that of a small hummingbird, beating at his throat. He made a painful mental effort of recognition. It was dark. Torches lit the hall. And to his front a high black door stared down at him, menacing. A door he knew too well. The smooth ebony wood rose to the ceiling.

Untouchable. Menacing.

The child stared helpless as his open palm lingered over the surface, a hesitant tremor as if guiding
blind eyes. An image hit him like the sting of a wasp, his hand closing tightly. He backed away staggering.

Drops of water fell from his clothing to the floor, but his mind was mute, all echoes, echoes, echoes.

He was always taught what to do and he obeyed dutifully, he was just seven and he was aware of that, he wasn't anyone enough to tell someone anything, he knew he only had to obey to earn praise and be left at peace. And he liked the praise he received from mommy when he was obedient and father's high encouraging eyes.

Brush your teeth, do not be loud, do not ask because you'll understand when older, eat your veggies, endure sessions, accept injections, do not be clumsy, open your mouth, swallow, tie your shoes right, swallow and like it, observe-duck-kill, listen to Grandpa, to Brother, to Nanny, obey. He had never done something akin as taking a leap of own volition, never, he was good, he always obeyed even in the games like the ones with Nanny, like when he had cars racing and she was the one to count backwards with an imagined flag… he was good- he was and all was only thought on images, images that twined with others and he was still in front of that door with wide eyes.

A sense of urgency, of avoidance tensed his body into flee mode. But he was paralyzed.

He…

*He had to know*

*He had to…*

*He had.*

*He…*

*He…*

**He deserved an explanation.**

He did! He deserved an explanation- and that was the first line of thought that weaved into meaning inside the febrile vacancy of his head. He barely remembered the run; it was all chaos until he spoke those words aloud. – He wanted an explanation-*explanation-* A comprehensible and neat explanation, like the one of how behind the thunder here are only crushing clouds… he wanted, he needed to know if… all... all-

Why…

Why?

why would- Why could- How could- *How could you.* - How could it all have ended with Him and the is it right or is it wrong- I-d-don't- I don't understand Brother, what had he done wrong to make Him do-it-all, it was his fault, he'd incited Brother, *he'd liked it*, it was his fault. *I don't understand-* he would say- I don't understand, because sometimes in lessons he did ask and say 'I don't understand Brother '. Lessons-echo to the word and his eyes closed.

Lessons, dive, duck, kill, drink, battlefield spree, the kiss game, His angel of death, words thundered in his headache like the metal hooves of a horse -breathe-endless endless the pouring truth, like a grain of rice puncturing the bag that on its own weight was now ripping open- because Andree's voice caroused inside his head, its quality lowered as if through and old on- and-off megaphone. Warm like that of a story-teller. Sharp like the edge of broken bottles -
Resolution. Panic had his chest ablaze but resolution rooted his feet on place. He felt angry, tricked, stupid, used, he bit his tongue- he needed to be told he'd got it wrong, desperately--

-...but... it had all made sense.

He knew the truth...And somehow he knew he would not see Nanny again.

*And it was his fault...*

**No.**

The boy shook his head. The boy hadn't started it. It'd been Him, it was what He'd done, and anger, hurt and anger stiffening his limbs, lifting his arm to let it hover over the high handle. He could not see Nanny again and that was His fault-And at the verge of a cardiac arrest he slammed open that huge door. And with unexpected force the child stormed inside.

*.*.*.*.*

Nice.

Leorio thought on how he'd never seen such an extensive view from a building. Skyscraper was the correct term. The almost thin air, miles far away from the crazed congestion below, elevated his spirit. Hidden in a corner he'd been observing for several minutes that black list hunter at the other end. As if members of different species.

The blonde had this way of placing all his weight in one foot, relaxed, when unseen by any soul. Alone was the word that silhouetted him against the night sky perfectly- There, on his own, he finally seemed to lower down his defenses.

Some ten minutes elapsed before Leorio approached.

The doctor felt a little sorry for interrupting. Kurapica's gaze appeared to had been summoned from under the million city lights.

"Hey"

"Hey" Kurapica voice was barely a rustle.

Leorio rested his elbows on the elegant balustrade to his side. In front stood Yorkshin, so alike to a sea of fallen stars and neon colours.

"...I can't believe we're here again"

Kurapica took his time to answer him.

"...It's like we never left"

"So...how has it been? To be here again for you...?"

"Work" Kurapica observed ahead, his eyes losing expression.

"Work?!"

"Well yeah... making some reconnaissance missions on how the Mafia landscape has been developing, you know"
"Why would you do that?" Leorio spoke somewhat horrified.

Well... why wouldn't he do that?

Kurapica kept the known silence- the one he knew was the equivalent door being slammed to Leorio's face. But going through the motions so many times had made them both more insensible to any awkwardness and more lenient to peace rather than conflict. Their demeanor actually no longer tensed at these small disputes. They just amassed a profound shared silence.

That couldn't be that good either, Leorio thought…

Abruptly, Kurapica snorted, swiftly taking a hand to his mouth.

The doctor stared back. Evidently swallowing the "What now" with the dignity he could gather. Kurapica cleared his throat.

"Sorry… It's just, you made me remember…something hilarious… but forget it"

"… I will" Leorio looked ahead, regretting a tad the childish pride in his voice.

Kurapica's hand delicately trailed the balustrade "all right" he paused as if speaking to himself first before addressing Leorio.

"I'll try. Uhm to recount it so you can laugh too" he said. Really trying.

"Wow, I'm honored"

Kurapica ignored him exhaling slowly. Sharing was new. Like that night he'd told them about his...chains...

He cleared his head.

"So I was dining with a client today"

Client? Wait, don't ask. Kurapica was speaking. Talk about progress.

"You should have been there. I was offered" and Kurapica's blue eyes lit "a wide array of gastronomical variety which was quite delightful and ...yummy" he spoke with delight. "Really crafty. Of course they wanted to convince me for a job I'd just declined. I… still do not know how much or what kind of information they posses about me though…that will involve a reconnaissance mission of my own…But" he cleared his throat focussing "for dessert came something fancy- And...it looked like lemon meringue pie accompanied by other elaborate sweet things – the kind of stuff Killua would've loved if he'd been there you know"

"Killua steals bonbons at weddings…"

"My point is… I couldn't take it"

"Take what? The situation?"

"The dessert"

"The dessert" Leorio repeated

"Yes…"
"Okay….brilliant story-

"No, no, Leorio really, seriously I actually couldn't accept it. Dessert is where you seal deals- but they served meringue pie and I actually didn't stand the thought of it . I had to refuse that obnoxious dessert as politely as I could. It was still there on the table, I actually had to ask particularly to remove its entity from my presence…" disbelief breathed through the blonde's recount.

"That had never happened in my life. All cues are so important in this kind of underground meetings!"

It did sound like Kurapica had a small world of small details, instead of the life threatening quests he actually carried out in secret. But he was laughing softly. "Well, the thing is, it's your fault." The blonde completed.

Leorio tried to shed sense to the claim and failed.

"My fault? Lemon pie? What?

"I thought you wouldn't remember." Kurapica sighed "well, it is of no importance. Forget it"

"No, no, no. You can't just leave a story half untold!"

"The story sounded better in my head. You were right, it's a boring story. Leave it"

"Come –on, I didn't even pry on any other stuff!"

"Well, that makes you above the average trained dog"

With a smirk, the blonde stopped the doctor's fist. Leorio eased his wrist... "Sorry. Forgot you…like being hated"

The doctor rolled his shoulders back, scoffed, exhaled loudly trying to forget the piece of damaged adults they both were "okay…okay… so Kurapica, what with meringue pies and secret clients” he questioned gruffly.

"…At the gourmet hunter market last year…You probably don't remember, but I had just eaten lunch and in general was a perfectly normal person. And you ruined it for me."

Leorio now wasn't sure of what was being spoken here, but felt an uncontrollable rush of paranoia. 

He could have ruined Kurapica in so many ways by now-

"Leorio, take your mind out of the gutter. That day at the gourmet market, you told me you used to bake lemon pies as a kid- remember? "

"Oh yeah"

"And you went on and on rattling effusively over meringue with that stupid pride of yours. You talked about meringue… And… eggs" Kurapica hesitated "and whites and yolk-ugh"

"You mean how I could almost magically spring out the perfect meringue from egg whites?"

"Yes"

"Yeah. I'm a wondrous dessert maker. And I love eating them. See? Not that bad in cuisine. So what?"
"When you described eloquently the procedure … well, probably my intellectual conscience knew this in some unrecognized level- how meringue is done-you know, if you beat egg whites, of course some of the hydrogen bonds in the proteins will unfold and then aggregate non-specifically, and then it's obvious that the change in structure leads to the consistency required for meringue and-"

He paused stumbling with Leorio's quizzical expression."You... seriously do have communication problems."

"Well, that day Leorio, you told me to 'smell it on the pie'” he quoted with his fingers in the air

"Uh?"

"I was about to eat my piece of pie after paying for it, when you told me to smell the eggs on the meringue pie, to really try to smell them! I mean, who does that? Who seriously does that? And you began describing the smell with detail and you were ruining me for meringue pie forever! You knew I didn't like eggs, they're just huge –uhm-unfertilized chicken ovules – and now eating lemon pie is being unable to stop myself from smelling the white of the eggs and thinking of amniotic liquid meringue paste and, and unborn poultry and-

"WHAT? Whoah! WHAT! Gross! Gee!"

"What do you expect? It's not like I had lemon pies or stuff of the sort in my childhood- and you told me to smell it-and now I can't eat meringue- "

Leorio's roar of laughter deafened his claims

"Unborn poultry!" Leorio laughed.

"Shouldn't have told you. My point was that I was risking serious business here and yet I couldn't accept the smell of that dessert and it was your fault… God, you're not even listening"

Leorio was indeed rumbling in laughter "What did you say about the… chicken ovules?"

Kurapica ignored him, his eyes fixed on the city below, evidently furious. Leorio's laughter died down eventually, accompanied by a last chuckle and a small gesture that produced a cigarette.

"Okay, okay, I'm done"

"So smoking" Kurapica's eyes were admonishing.

"These times I do" Leorio shrugged. "So Kurapica, I have my revenge"

"What? Making me miserable has evened out the fact I hate your cooking?"

Leorio burst on laughter again to which Kurapica cringed.

"Relax! Even I had forgotten that. After all we've been served meals for kings for two weeks now! Who keeps track?" Leorio questioned "Oh right, you, because you are a bitter-"

"I'm not."

"You know you only hate me cooking rice because, well… Yeah. I can't do it right. It's difficult…"

"It's the easiest dish on earth"

"But all the rest is good isn't it?"
"Don't get me started on your cooked fish"

"Yeah yeah, that as well, BUT I am a decent cook in all other aspects AND" he claimed inspired "besides, you ruined me before I ever ruined you"

"Excuse me?"

"Canela Ice cream! Any rings?"

"Canela Ice…-Oh god" Kurapica too a hand to the bridge of his nose, but Leorio shook his head.

"No- oh! I was happily taking my ice cream, liking it because it was cinnamon flavored. And there you go and said "it doesn't taste at all like cinnamon",

"I know what I said" he muttered and snapped murderous "Don't you mimic my voice"

"And I was super-duper extra happy with my ice cream."

"I get the point"

"And you go and say how it tastes exactly like Tylenol for kids"

"Well yeah, it did"

"I HATED YOU"

"So what! I was right. They probably share a similar artificial flavoring"

"Okay, so that ice cream did taste like Tylenol but I hadn't made the connection, and since then I could never erase that new information from my mind" he raised his voice dramatically "and I had to throw my ice cream away! And I've never been able to like Canela ice cream ever since"

"How sad"

"What would you know about medicine like Tylenol anyways"

"Everyone knows the basics. Even me, who was a social outcast until youth" He shrugged.

"You're still a social outcast"

But, contrary to the usual protest Leorio was expecting in their tennis match, this time Kurapica shrugged and agreed.

"Yes… I am…and at this rate I'll always be one. I don't care anyways." He laughed daring.

Leorio inhaled patience loudly "And now you are going to make me say I was bullying you and I'll feel guilty about it."

"No"

"Lies. You're going to make me say you're not a social outcast"

"No. I am a social outcast"

"You're a not a social outcast"

Kurapica rolled his eyes "Why is this important again?"
"You're not an outcast"

"Am"

"Not"

"Leorio, it's not as if I care for tags-"

"That's not a tag! That's like-uhm- a political statement! First of all you belong to the hunter community!" Leorio rose his voice improvising. It did sound better in his head.

"Lame. No. I don't. I'm a loner."

"Ok. So I don't excel at arguing but you have to admit that's a lie."

"Landmine here Leorio" and his smirk was a bit sociopathic.

"I'm not speaking about your life quest! Damn! I just… I know that somewhere you like the idea of having friends and of meeting people"

Kurapica shrugged "if this is about yesterday I'm not changing my decision"

However Leorio proceeded incensed.

"I know you like travelling with us. You like having friends. You just have trouble looking up to the future, that's all."

That was quite risky to say. And it met silence.

Kurapica felt small amounts of ire increasing his heart rate. So Leorio wasn't that far off truth and that nagged him but what was the point anyways? He honestly did not understand why Leorio was so determined to lit candles for the obvious funeral cortege that traversed through his mind each day. How could he possibly believe he'd had the power to make anything better, oh just the purpose made it insufferable, beyond words and the fake sympathy he always received and -. 

Leorio's voice reached him some place far.

"Look…I know it's difficult but... please listen. The future, Kurapica, it doesn't have to be specifically one way… You can do whatever you want with your life, your future bears endless possibilities, its wondrous, it doesn't have to restrain you-"

"And now you sound like my Sensei. Leorio, I'm doing exactly what I want" Kurapica snapped, but Leorio panicking, blabbered unrestrained.

"No no, just listen. Just try to imagine it. Another future, one actually suitable for a human being. Just please envision it for a second- a Kurapica in the future, looking at an insanely beautiful blue sea. Or by a nice cottage in a mountain forest, yes, standing tall by the side of someone fine, with all your past actually behind. Who knows?! Maybe you'll be an award-winning writer or maybe you'll have a nice family with kids, six dogs, and six cats, all with little bows right? You surely will be by then a millionaire, retiring quite young after years of chess- playing the subs at your own command. And maybe you won't even remember that obnoxious doctor fella that did the hunter test with you, because you'll be so happy"

Leorio stopped his rant inhaling shakily. He knew he was liable to overextend things beyond their hyperbole when nervous but oh heavens didn't he know when to stop?!
"Woah- Wow... You stopped? Great. Wow. A round of applause for you Leorio" Kurapica was wordless between incredulity and hilarity. "Active imagination. Classic of children with ADHD."

"You know what I meant-"

"Yes, thanks for the postcard picture-" sarcasm served on a chuckle "Not my style though...Family. Seriously you had to mention family."

Leorio winced a little. Kurapica's eyes softened as he turned away, looking far.

"Leorio, I am leaving" He spoke faintly.

The silence was cold under the moonless sky.

"I know you are. Don't repeat it like a broken record" Leorio spoke fast as if he could erase Kurapica's statement. "I was just saying that you weren't a "-

"AND I am a loner" Kurapica added gracefully.

"God, here we go again." Leorio groaned both hands to his head.

…But if he didn't contradict Kurapica's every move, they'd agree...wouldn't they? And if they agreed…

Then there'd be this silence… this polar like –silence. It was better to contradict him whatever the clause defended, it was better to bother him beyond his realm of comfort rather than-

Kurapica tried to engage on conversation almost reading the doctor's mind.

"Maybe" he pointed out "we defer on our definition of loner. Here I present to you a guy who has scarcely any friends, nor any social network profile"

Leorio laughed, a little forced, but trying

"Not one of us can afford social networks. We are hunters" he shrugged.

"Says the guy that had MySpace back on the times"

Leorio felt his cheeks slightly hot "What?"

"You did have a MySpace."

"So...how did you know?" the doctor gave a drag to his cigarette trying to sound casual.

"Basal digging on the past of the ones that surround me?" The blonde spoke as if elemental.

"God, I've never done that" Leorio muttered under his breath.

"See-I am a loner. I distrust people" Kurapica lectured him.

"But I'm here. And don't tell me it's because you background checked me and found only a MySpace. I mean, you must have background checked Killua for that matters."

Kurapica shrugged silent.

"Say it" Leorio insisted.
"I'm a loner"

"No. Say it"

"Ok. I liked you guys. You were cool. We stuck together. Now I'm leaving. Happy?"

"No. Admit you're no longer a loner" He repeated with a tight jaw as if it bore a hidden meaning of utmost importance.

"Leorio" Kurapica sighed stubborn "hard data on here for you regarding this person you met" He opened his arms "One, I'm better off by myself. Believe it or not. I generally dislike people. What else? Oh, right, I despise, no, I deplore the human race and its selfish nature. I do" he stressed at Leorio's skeptical expression "I've only given myself a vacation once in my entire life and it has been with none other but you four. I barely know anyone but neon Nostrad team, or what was left of us, only you guys know my story fully, no one else, I've even forgotten the last name of my sensei-and I really do not care whether he dies- I can't even get naked with any other but you- I really am a loner"

"you do care if we die don't you?" Leorio said with heroic momentum before he stumbled - wait" he paused "wait-what?" the doctor gaped in delay.

"What what"

"W-what-what did you say?"

"Whatever"

"Repeat the last uhm please?"

"Uhm, no?"

"Naked? Was that a compliment? An insult? Wait, why-uhm what again?" There was a silence and a roll-eye on Kurapica's behalf- Leorio was evidently flustered. The blonde evidently didn't feel shame.

"Yes... Leorio" he spoke as if to a child "feel better, you're the only person I can get naked with. And... brush my teeth with" he added quickly the last. That was something very personal.

"Uhm..." Leorio was still stunned

"What do you expect? I am a loner type; don't act so surprised" he paused "Oh god you're still stuck with the naked part"

"I...I didn't know uhm you- and then- the brush your teeth stuff-uhm- I mean-" he fixed his glasses blinking.

"Evidently for you it's not the same" Kurapica shrugged askance "we are different people."

Leorio was in total stage fright. Anyway, he couldn't add much to the argument... He'd had his many fair plays in his life. Girls, boys, it did not matter much.

"Uhm..." the doctor still kept wide-eyed "thank you?"

"What, for letting you see me naked?" Kurapica suddenly seemed to enjoy how awkward he'd made Leorio

"Well you don't do that. Only sometimes" the doctor tried to comment casually, failing miserably.
"Whatever. You still get much more than anyone"

"Oh you're so full of yourself" Leorio recovered atonement with gall

"I'm not the one that goes fooling around"

"Fooling around?!

"Oh come on. You want to sleep with whatever thing that moves"

"What?!

"Oh come on. You want to sleep with whatever thing that moves"

"What?!

"Okay, so maybe it is. You know what I believe? That you have a great power to lie to yourself and to believe your lies. Oh so you're such a loner! I'll concede you're independent, and prefer working on your own. Great for you. But say it, looking at me in the eye- and say that you're not leaving because the guys got involved again -"

"I'm leaving because I want to. Because I'm better off without you" He spoke through his teeth, holding harshly Leorio's gaze.

It hit hard.

"Leorio, if you at least do the math, I haven't spent time with anyone as many years as I had with my tribe" He looked directly at him "and it's gone. So you don't get to tell me if I have guts or no, or tell me what I want or where should I be, or to whom should I stick. You don't"

"No… I don't" Leorio closed his eyes, a hand to the bridge of his nose.

There was a heavy, nasty silence between them.

Long.

"I'm sorry"

Kurapica didn't answer.

"…Well…I…still get to see you naked…i guess." Leorio tried.

"I knew you'd say that" The blonde snapped lowly.

"Ok, so here is me recanting for your sake…You do have much more guts than me. I mean you have seen more guts than me no? –ok that was not phrased right- but-but I know you're fed up with the discourse of 'you have us' and 'we've got your back', its difficult and you are free…" Leorio opened his arms resigned "also you are extraordinarily brave for standing here in one piece after it all, and yes I admire you and think you do have a future, but I won't ever repeat all this again" He exhaled "Happy?"

"Yes"

"Good"

"I'm sorry as well" Leorio's surprise softened Kurapica's expression as he spoke "I can be very intense at times…"
"Yes... intense" Leorio nodded.

"Yes..."

"And stubborn"

"Persistent" Kurapica corrected.

"And edgy. And caustic. And callous"

"Ok, don't overdo it"

Silence

"Also...I'd never heard you talk about naked and se-" Leorio added but was immediately interrupted.

"You know? we can forget we had this conversation"

"Ok. Please. Thank you"

Leorio looked relieved for being stopped at that rant.

Silence

Leorio tried to hide the smirk but failed. Kurapica took some seconds to sigh and humor him faintly chuckling.

"Ok, before I leave...I'll..." the blonde hesitated... "I'll grant you that I like when you make me laugh"

Nice.

"The feeling is reciprocal" Leorio bowed like a gentleman.

"I also like when the guys make me laugh" Kurapica murmured with a nostalgic semblance.

"Well... you must admit they're adorable"

"Adorable and deadly. And chaotic, have you seen heir room? Like without exaggerating, pizza slices, empty cans, dirty clothing, crumbs on the floor and a hole on the wall somewhere"

"Always!" Leorio agreed laughing "You know, before they left, I went to bid them goodbye, that morning" A candid memory seemed to lighten his expression. Leorio's arms raised as if he was trying to paint the portrait.

"So Gon opens me. Greeting me all polite, while sporting nothing but shorts and a towel to his neck tied like a cartoon hero. And behind him, I could see Killua unaware of the world, kneeling in front of a fan, trying out robot Darth Vader voices...That, image, wow, that image is saved here" he poked his head twice "archived to bully them when they become older".

Kurapica laughed "Have you seen them train together? They last an hour longer sorely on monosyllabic bets on who can make the most sit-ups"

"Upside down"

"they are so simple and happy" Leorio exhaled.
"Are they? ...This life they are leading as if normal...along with their own stories, its unique. You know how they've grown isolated from any institution like schools and children their age? They just play unrestrained and fight the villains like most boys only fantasize they could... They are young, they are powerful and naïve." Kurapica trailed.

"Yes" Leorio sighed... "And that's dangerous...they've grown in an adult world"

"That is why they adapt so easily to challenging situations..."

They both were let on their own reflections.

"Well Killua definitely lets him win always" Leorio finally added.

"Gon?Aaah there you are wrong. With keen observation you can tell Gon actually wins over Killua many times. As much as Killua does. But Killua acting careless totally tones it down, making it appear as if he'd let Gon win! He's cunning"

"He's a troubled mess up of a daredevil" The doctor took a drag of his long forgotten cigarette.

There was a pause.

"He'll follow him anywhere" Kurapica sighed.

"Yeah...Killua would follow Gon to the end of the world"

"Oh, I meant Gon. He'll follow Killua..."

"To the end of the world. You think so? Gee, why can't we have a friendship like that?"

"Because you guys are different from me" Kurapica stared ahead.

There was a long silence. Same pebble on his shoe.

Leorio exhaled.

"You...don't need to leave"

Kurapica's eyes were warm, looking at the brilliant stars ahead.

"You know...In the midst of this self-absorbed society and their wicked, destructive paths- Individuals moved by their own egotistic purposes- in a world ruled by Machiavellian laws of ends over means, the trampling above the innocent and the grinding flesh in the teeth of the ones with power" The blonde's voice came out strangled as he spoke fast...

"... Well, amidst those thousands of millions one finds them..." Kurapica's shrugged hesitating "and one finds...you..." he looked up to the sky "You all... "He gazed with clear blue eyes.

Leorio blinked.

New. Too much at once and he choked and coughed.

Kurapica looked at him interested.

Leorio hit with a fist his chest "You are being too serious" He blinked "It scares me"

Kurapica laughed "Tit for tat. If you can rant, I can rant"
Leorio cleared his throat still a little overwhelmed.

"...Thank you...."

"You're welcome"

Silence. Dreadful dreary silence

"I'm starving" Leorio let out.

"I'm starving as well"

"China?"

"No! Hate it. What about pasta?"

"You're so traditional..."

"You choose then"

"Taco's?"

"Awful"

"Will I get to see you naked? I mean, you're leaving" Leorio tossed casually.

Kurapica, instead of bearing a homicidal stare, as usual, for some unknown reason smiled.

"I don't know. Maybe. Get me drunk" He shrugged before adding solemnly "But Taco's is an awful idea"

Leorio was on his own victory dance. This is why he didn't catch immediately how Kurapica suddenly froze, his pupils widening in the dark. An instant later his fighting blades were lifted against the darkness.

A shadow walked towards them.

And its aura...

It was either a Spider... or a Zoldick...

*.*.*.*.*

With unexpected force the child opened that huge door.

And like a veritable seismograph of the stress levels in his veins, he jumped startled at the door slamming behind him.

And Brother- He felt his air cut-Brother was there. In the desk. His breath was held but Brother hadn't even lifted his eyes at the intrusion. As if he hadn't noticed his disruptive presence at all.

He was frozen. But he inhaled air. He had too.

"B-brother" He whispered.

Then louder "Brother"
Illumi didn't do any sign of acknowledgement.

The boy swallowed hard.

Since he'd left Andree's house he could tell the world itself had irreversibly changed. Inverted and disfigured. He was panting, he felt bewildered because hanging from shreds he thought all would bear the signs of the wreckage. And yet he stood in the midst of silence until Illumi's pen stood still. And his dismissive sterile monotone was the same from yesterday and the day before- and the day before to that, and the day before to the day he was born.

"Killua, they've been looking for you. I'm currently busy. I'll see you tomorrow at practice" His words were that soft low monotone... But there, at the edge of consonants prowled a bodily restraint that made the child shudder.

"B-Brother-"

"Killua" he interrupted "Obey"

The boy felt teeth grinding suppression. Brother's tone bore that undesired apathy the prowling street dog receives from a stranger. Worst was that the boy was aware he was programmed to lower his head to that tone -he thought with his head low and unable to raise- because this had been the case a hundred times- when he was out-of-place and the dark eyes were too high to lower to his own. As mother's and father's were. But He... He...

This time, he was biting his tongue not to move as he'd been ordered. But the man in the room didn't seem to notice the messy alteration his breathing was. And then a two worded assertion ran from his mouth unrestrained.

"You knew"

It was a whisper. The child panicked and chewed to spit them louder "You knew!"

The instant prolonged until the impassive black eyes fixed their stare on him.

"Killua" Black-black eyes, like black-black glass. But the child took a step closer.

"You knew Illumi... you knew!" He tried out the name with startling adrenaline- And it hardened. His expression as the child had never seen- and yet he couldn't stop repeating incessantly, as if the beads of a rosary "You knew, you knew, you knew, you knew, you knew-"

"What is this... little brother"

The label was like a whip-

"You were doing wrong things with me!" the boy yelled. His eyes were stinging "You were, and I didn't know! And you knew! You knew! you-"

Illumi stood from his chair severe, slicing his voice to silence.

And the icy dark eyes met him, to take his entire frame in a silent grasp.

But the boy shut his eyes tight "you...were doing... wrong things to me and... you knew" his voice scraped. Suddenly no longer fierce...only hurt...

"What wrong things Killua?" Devoid of any surprise or mercy, as if there was no child in front. His stare was so eerily similar to when he stood over his prey after the bloodshed... black eyes. Lifeless.
Illumi took a step closer and the boy felt dizzy

"You-you know what things" the boy bit his lip drowning-drowning-

Illumi spoke and each of his words seemed to progressively bear brutal gravity of their own, his tone modulating from the soft murmur to the steely cold, his dominion extended beyond the room into his own weak body.

"Speak them Killua. What things?"

A subtle derision coating the question, and the boy shook strongly his head, shutting tight his eyes.

"Speak them" and he felt wetness down his cheek as he denied again- and Illumi repeated the instruction with force "Speak them" but the child wallowed air

"I don't want to say them! –It's -It's your fault! You made me do -"

"I made you do…?"

The lack of words reached down his throat, tightly knotted. Illumi had taken another step and he was too close now, when he raised a cold hand slowly, about to graze his cheek- panic-

"DON'T TOUCH ME" He'd slapped Illumi away. In delay he heard himself- and he immediately knew he'd done wrong -he'd crossed the line-he'd crossed the line- a dash of motion in his peripheral vision and his feet suddenly hung from the ground, his back against the wall.

Illumi held him there, observing fascinated the child's tight shut eyes.

"Killua” he was summoning the boy to open his eyes, his tone low, silken, vicious "Do not slap me away ever again" Do not dare to -And somehow the boy could tell how Brother had wanted more than just the boy's outcry- certain darkness kept at bay that froze him, that bowed his head, that made him nod. He was released.

Killua landed on his knees painfully.

Wet trails smudged his cheeks.

"Stop crying Killua. Control yourself"

The boy held his breath, still a mess, weak, weak, Illumi stared at him enough to bow the child's head.

"You are a killer. You are a Zoldick" His lack of tone variation now sinister. "You don't feel Killua. You have never felt" viscid words, words like gossamer, like black ink "never. Now control yourself"

Icky just like a fresh IV on an exposed wrist, Illumi's words were dripping to the back of his head. And the boy shook his head flinching, he inhaled air, he tried to collect himself and shut away the uneasiness that rose and fell on his lungs.

"Just focus on the rules Killua” Illumi spoke and his words cast shadows and echoes, echoes like corroding steel on working gears, the machinery of his brain screeching against His machinations, his dark machinations.

Illumi turned, giving him his back.
A faint "You are dismissed" reached him "Conduct yourself to your room"

The boy sat there on the floor.

The child shut his eyes, he tried to obey, he tried to hold his breath without making any sound, any crying sounds, he refused to become aware at the specified moment, of the biting truth of what he thought after the world changed, he refused, he refused, he'd do anything to forfeit his capacity to recall, but he could not help it- the drowning feeling of prickling injustice because he could not return to his room-he could not- and his hands fisted, his teeth clenched, it was so unfair, it was so unfair what He'd done- what He'd done.

"I-Illumi" the boy mumbled again his name, and there was no turning back "I w-won't follow a-any rules" he whispered.

Brother did not turn. He just stood there still.

He hadn't felt fear like this before, swallowing him in waves, but Andree's words were branded to the skin of his thoughts in ways he could not measure, they just amassed leaps of anger up his chest.

"Illumi.." he tried again louder, his voice sounding so frail- the name alien in his tongue "I-m I'm n-not following rules, n-not anymore" and he couldn't help it, he felt anger, unleashed anger, "You did me wrong! You did things! I'm not coming here again- I'm not, I'm not, I'm NOT!" and Illumi stared at his surprising outrage but the boy heard his own voice bellowing "YOU LIED" He wiped his face "YOU LIED! YOU LIED! YOU DID THINGS!-YOU DID WRONG THINGS! I HATE YOU! I HATE YOU! I HATE-

The boy hit the floor with his left cheek.

The sheer force had knocked him off his feet.

The seven-year old stared up. Illumi had never used force on him. Not that way.

...The possibility had been implied in each of Brother's moves. His oppressive dominion, his implacable unsparing torture. And yet all of it had always been inside the frame of training. A drop of blood oozed down the child's forehead to his eyelid and cheek like a red tear. Andree's words, he clung to them, he had to-

"I'm telling father"

Illumi observed him, like something strange.

...But then Brother took a step, and there was a smirk on the curve of his lip. The drop of blood, trickling down his cheek seemed to spur the man in a way that felt wrongfully familiar and still like something he'd never seen-

Then the lights flickered and Illumi had him spread eagled against the ground, hovering above him. His grip was so vicious it'd bruise his arms- and wordless terror kicked in-

"Shhhhh Killua" one of his hands covered his mouth. The boy shook his head to a side to free himself but his jaw was gripped firmly to force him still.

"Actually I want to know" the man whispered "Tell me Killua, what will you tell father." He spoke smoothly "tell me exactly what will you tell him"

"I- I"
But he was silenced by foreign lips on his own.

His mouth had been forced open.

He felt shock.

He moved his lips as he'd been taught in a reflex. He stopped; he shut his eyes and wailed.

"This is what you wanted to do yesterday Killua? When you went to salute me?"

"I, no- I" he shook his head but a hand was placed over his mouth and Illumi spoke against his own knuckles.

"I wonder if father will believe you…” He muttered breathily "….or me…” He felt cold fingers inside his shirt.

And it all happened to fast. The boy's small hand had turned into a claw, but that same instant he hit the wall painfully. Next thing Illumi lifted him by his shirt's neck and he heard his own scraping scream- DON'T TOUCH ME - a howl tearing his throat- and he could not breathe. He could not breathe. He began choking. His back was hit against the wall again, for silence.

"Don't ever order me again" a black coercive threat reached the crushing fist that held his right hand

"Have you understood Killua?"

The boy could barely speak, but much against his will and sense his head kept refusing, his head shaking his eyes tight shut.

"Killua" He bent to the child's ear to whisper.

"No one will believe you because there is no story to tell." He let his lips hover there, letting those words sink in. The lifeless voice created reality, a weighing truth, he must be right- he must be right-

"But-

"Have you understood Killua?"

The boy looked up, then closed his eyes, and negated with his head. He was hit against the wall softly. And suddenly he realized he'd been here before- other times- other thousand times-

"Have you understood, Killua?"

And as sudden he kicked the man free- and took a turn he'd never used before: to run out on Brother. To run out. The handle was at the boy's grasp when he was taken by his arm. And this time, Brother's black black stare was ire, his constrained movements, fury.

Then it all happened too fast for him to follow- he'd hanged from the door knob, but the world revolved on its axis and he landed sprawled- and he barely managed to understand he was on the bed when Illumi was turning him on his back harshly. He spread his arms as if thirsty of something unrecognisable,- similar to a predator unfurling his prey lusting its blood and he felt frozen.

Illumi's eyes were black. And void. A void as he'd never seen. A fury and yearn mingled in a lack of… humanity that the boy had never witnessed, it terrified him, it paralyzed him-

"If you tell anyone" Illumi paused to take low relish, lips against his skin "Then, Killua, I want to hear every word of it' and his small body was engulfed by that one vicious stare.
"But there is still so little to tell" The man hovered over him and the world became heinous- he did not understand why but his wrists were held till his hands turned blue, panic cut his throat as he howled pleading, and he asked for forgiveness, please, he did, and he promised not tell, he wouldn't, he promised, he wouldn't, I'm sorry, I'm sorry but it was too late, it was too late- please -but he was screaming- He screamed Brother-Brother-but the man didn't hear- he still screamed for Brother. He screamed for Father. He screamed for Nanny. He screamed for God. He screamed for help.

He screamed until he was left voiceless.

*.*.*.*.*

Killuaaa!"

Her long scream met its lonely echo. Elaine ran through the forest, down the path siding the purple mountains, they were too immense, the Zoldick expanses, he could be anywhere, anywhere

"Ki-llu-aaa!"

He supposedly was in an assignment, but she could bet on whatever, she could bet on her late mother and Mika the dog it wasn't true, something was off, -she knew something had been wrong for long, something was wrong, she just knew it, and her hands hugged her shoulders. The child's voice inside her head, it raised her heart beat and gnawed her open.

"Ki-llu-aaa!"

Her call gave a dreadful hue to the evening skies, but she did not dare stop her search- dare you stop Elaine and I'll hack your wrists off-she would find the child. The guards said he'd gone out and re entered. He was in the woods, he had to be, he hadn't been seen in the mansion-

WHAM

She fell square on her face and knees.

Her elbow scraped. She was wet with the mild dew rain. But as she raised her head, there, at arm's length she saw one of Killua's sneakers…

Tasting dust on her mouth her unsteady hand reached it. She sat some instants with the small shoe in her hands gulping air. The laces were undone.

She began running again, trying to block out the stinging anguish, activating her butler- killer-hunting skills- cold and awake for any signals of the boy as she ran. .

She called for the small boy again and her echo sounded desolate like the abandoned carcass of a vessel at the early hours -desperate like a blind's mind hand.

*.*.*.*.*

The night was pitch black. The silver in Kurapica's blades came from the ghostly city lights far below.

"Wow, you can't even agree about food" A dark playful voice.

Not a spider.
A Zoldick.

Contrary to what you'd think, Kurapica's brow relaxed. For a second he'd really thought he'd sensed something bigger. But the white-haired boy they'd come to know so well was the one to walk into the faint light. In his own signature relaxed pose. With laughing eyes. Laughing cruel eyes. "I waited for long for you to come over. All so I could say" Killua dedicated them a wide smile. "Busted"

Ugh-Like a kick to their guts.

The doctor swallowed, throwing away the long ago burnt out cigarette behind his back. Not at all unnoticed "Since when have you been here?!

"Uhm…let's see…Two hours prior any of you two arrived? Approximately"

"What! Why? Where?"

"Right here" He pointed to the ground with one of his fingers. "So, smoking eh?" Killua noted with a questioning eyebrow. "Smoking and having fun you two?"

The prick! Killua was probably right next to him when he'd been observing Kurapica!

"When did you and Gon arrive to the city?" Leorio spoke strained

"Tomorrow is Gon's day…you know, our mission"

Oh, that was important. Leorio's voice immediately turned protective "How did you get that cut underneath your eye?"

Killua rolled his eyes "Biscuit's training- she's an ogress-"

"Any reason not to speak to announce your presence before, Killua? " Kurapica interrupted him "I mean, beside showing off your Tsetsu, overhearing on purpose and acting immature?" The blonde maintained with difficulty the civilized tone.

"Ooh, a world of reasons" Killua shrugged with a small smile "Curiosity amongst them of course. You see, you two there, speaking of such a variety of subjects! And me here, planning out my vengeance, it seemed harmonic"

"What vengeance? Why would-"

"I'll be a good guy and won't bring out the subject of your hidden smoking or of your uhm, shared nudity"

Oh no. And behind his smug grin you could tell he was trying hard not to laugh "BUT here's my revenge. This" He waved a hand to the expanse of cement their shared. "Is how it feels being stepped on your private space" He tilted a vampy grin as the pair fell silent. "I bet you can relate now" And Killua's tone was an even monotone, his eyes smoldering-ly daring.

There was such a satisfying blush on both of their cheeks and angry eyes.

"Gon and I ate already. But you go ahead and have a nice dinner without meringue pie" The boy smirked backtracking.

"You don't get to do that!" Kurapica growled angry.

Killua did stop on his tracks, but as if remembering something else. He turned to fix his stare on
Kurapica's heightening blush, but the beautiful violet hue on his eyes was now unreadable. He cleared his voice.

"Uhm...so are you leaving?" Killua's hands were inside his muff.

"Oh. That. No, not now...It was meant in the long run." Kurapica blinked.

Killua expression for an instant was that of someone sad but not deluded. Before he easily slipped into the inexpressive mask he usually wore and nodded.

"I only wish to ask..." And Killua dived straight on. "Kurapica... if anything happened and I couldn't... would you and Leorio be there for Gon?"

"Of course we would" Kurapica frowned "Why?"

"Great. So we have a promise" Killua's eyes were serious yet kind.

"Why are you asking? Is tomorrow too difficult?" Leorio intervened.

"Is it a pinky promise? Actually tomorrow's easy"

"Where's Biscuit?" The doctor abruptly asked.

"She already left. She gave us all the tips she had and all the training we needed" Killua shrugged. "Though she probably would have loved to overhear your charming conversation"

"If you don't cut it-" Kurapica threatened.

"Oh but I love you guys" Killua's eyes smiled with great satisfaction "just beware Kurapica" He spoke wicked "Because one day I'll spring up your window and catch you naked... I guess then Leorio won't be the only one!"

"YOU PIECE OF"

But the boy had disappeared into thin air. Leaving the echo of his laughter like the Cheshire cat. The glass door on their backs was swinging.

Silence

"How does he do that!"

"I HATE HIM!" Kurapica unexpectedly yelled to the sky.

Leorio was not impressed by this. He still seemed stunned.

"He's intelligent"

"It's not like he thinks!"

"Is it?"

"I HATE HIM!"

"Did...did he say he loved us?"

Kurapica at this gave Leorio a side look. And the doctor was smacked on his head.
"Ouch"

"I hate my life" Kurapica sighed miserably.

"Do you hate pizza?"

"No"

"There we go"

"I still hate him"

"But he loves us!"

A second smack

*.*.*.*.*

"Again"

Biscuit hands were on her hip. For all that mattered, she'd given his student what he'd asked- she was now on her alter-ego form she most hated and was more powerful at.

Killua jumped at her with anger. She deflected him. Well, so he still caught her by surprise, he was agile. And now they were in open combat.

Smoothing their way into the battle, she gradually increased the Nen power in her attacks.

Again, Killua lost momentum. Imperceptible but enough to slip from attack to defense…

"Do not stop" She commanded, aiming a chop at his neck that he evaded "do not hesitate or you are dead"

Biscuit attacked- lunged and struck barely moving but Killua lost ground, defensive, defending, defense –

"React!"

Biscuit could tell he was trying to fight back, failing. Biscuit increased again her Nen power. His moves turned erratic, his eyes, you could tell you'd lost signal. Oh, his defense was perfect- She aimed a kick to his neck, he moved to avoid it. But he wasn't home.

Biscuit suddenly held his wrist.

"Stop"

She perceived how disturbingly quick he obeyed. He allowed being held with no resistance.

Biscuit released him and took distance.

"I'm calling a break."

Killua ran his hand across his hair, taking off the sweat. It'd been two hours. Only then he became aware of the small drop of blood down his cheek. Two damned hours. He felt empty.

Biscuit observed how the boy's eyes were now the color of concrete.
**What moves you Killua?**

Sometimes it seemed that nothing. Not in the way things moved Gon, evidently.

Killua- she took note- observant, deflective. Sometimes cool, sometimes quick of tongue when playful, but most of the time perceptive, distanced, removed. Probably a golden heart she wasn’t allowed to know well and undecipherable motives.

Gon… he had a natural way of reading subtleties out of Killua’s impermeable misdemeanor. Killua eased in his presence, he actually became more readable. Undoubtedly happier, healthily so.

That wasn't half enough.

The silver-haired boy now observed her owlish.

*Gon was so easy to spur. You obey rather than seek...*

Biscuit inhaled air.

"Do you understand what your weakness is Killua?"

The thirteen year old observed her wary.

"Your weakness is that you give up too quickly. You are too careful when it comes to battle" She diagnosed unequivocally. "In other words you underestimate yourself. This is why, when you confront an opponent that you consider stronger than you, you fight with the objective of running away"

He saw the faint surprise in his countenance. His mouth opened as if to protest but...he had nothing to say.

"Before I say anything else" Biscuit proceeded "I want you to know that it's not your fault"

Not his fault. He'd heard that before. He'd heard that…when, or where, he'd heard that…The words, the memory slipped through his open hands-and yet somehow those words brought revulsion.

"It's the responsibility of the person that taught you how to fight."

His eyes deadened, as if lights dimming. His limbs became visibly lifeless. She raised her voice to catch his gaze again. "Killua" she spoke firm. Her strong voice derailed him. "Established habits are not easy to get rid of..." she stated "But you can work on it."

There was a faint, almost non-existent shake of his head, too imperceptible, too imagined, and yet it triggered her ire. It somehow spoke of immediate obedience, defeat-the same molded pathway he exhibited in one to one combat-

"…One thing I will say is Killua…" She raised her voice

"If you don't work this out soon, one day, in some battle ahead… you will leave Gon to die, without helping him." She spoke severe, resolute.

Truth. Like a splatter of blood.

Killua's eyes had shot wide in surprise-

Then his arms had relaxed at his sides. On his eyes, prison bars, iron bars, where he stood behind,
Biscuit took a step "Killua"

The boy didn't flinch, his gaze empty.

"Your fighting style comes from wrong beliefs and frames of training. If you open your mind to analyze it, you and Gon have witnessed how battle power can vary hugely depending on the state of mind the fighter is at, and the environment the confrontation takes place"

It was true. Gon had defeated Bomber. And Killua never once doubted the raven wouldn't be able… but he...

"In your case, you consider the opponent's maximum power, and you assume the worst case scenario before you even begin fighting." She pointed out, trying to keep neutral to his stare. "Even when you face an opponent of equal strength, you value yourself under the score and compromise your idea of survival before any action has happened. You enter the battlefield ready to flee" She raised her arm pointing at him.

"If the opponent is even slightly stronger than you, you give up. Beyond anything else you don't think what could be done to win at all"

Biscuit took a step, unyielding, to get closer to the boy- to move him.

"Your mind is like that of a beaten dog"

"Ugh"

She saw his fist clench and his jaw tighten

"From now on, you must train and fight to lose that habit. You will need strength and determination to fight opponents that are stronger than you-you'll need the strength to stop running"

She saw it, the gears in operation.

"Killua" and her tone sounded deadly "if you can't work that out… then" she looked intensely at him "you should leave Gon's side"

The boy stared frozen. He stood still, still as death.

...

There are words made of silence - the kind of words that heaped at his throat, congealed on his mouth and broke on their way out like glass.

There are words that burn the place they fall and lit like wildfire. Words unloaded like charcoal wagons over his heavy soul.

Words used as tactics.

Words that bear truth...

Biscuit observed his amethyst eyes, his mind probably orbiting far from where they stood.

Killua's battle upbringing … those shackles, she thought, could not be broken without a great deal of effort…
When that kick hit his gut Gon was waken entirely from his slumber in shock.

You see, Killua had slept so heavily lately he didn't even thrash in bed as he used too. Which was good. Meds were working. It was actually awesome...

Well, not tonight.

Gon cursed like a drunk. He turned away. In two seconds he was in REM sleep for real.

**KICK.**

Gon groaned mad. Killua turned to one side. He mumbled. He kept mumbling, *Annoying.*

Then he fell silent,

… Oh, blessed silence. Gon was again happy. The softness of the sheets was so inviting…

And then Killua turned on his side of the bed taking with him the blankets.

"Stop moving" Gon protested. Minutes extended silently. Mmm, his point seemed to be taken…

Aaaand another kick. So no. This time Gon groaned against his pillow, took the sheets back and rolled in them to his side of the bed.

Settled.

He closed his eyes. Rest…Final rest…

*Moan.*

Killua…I want to strangle you.

He curled further inside the bed. He yearned with all his limbs to keep cuddled in the thickness of sleep far away from Killua and his kicks. It was their first night not sleeping in a tent but in a real bed. Killua should be sleeping like a baby angel. Well Biscuit was being too hard on them. He leant his entire weight to the cotton texture of sleep. Distant he felt another faint moan but it was *just probably* one of Killua's dreams-*and who*-he yawned, *who knows what*…As always, probably it would be gone on its own. Stupid selfish zombie Killua-.* sob.*

Gon had a strong perception it'd been in his mind.

Aaaand no. There it was again. A *sob.* For real.

It was bizarre. Gon inhaled and finally incorporated. Dark. He tried to fathom the silhouette of things as he rubbed his eyes. Then, that sob again.

"Killua?" he called slightly bothered, turning towards his friend at the other side of the bed.

Killua's was lying on his tummy. The hand that held the blanket had its knuckles white against the mattress, a tight fist. But Killua was dead still. He did not move an inch for quite long… Gon's heavy lids began closing.

He'd seen Killua's zombie nightmares, a few times in the past. Next day the silver-haired boy never,
honestly never remembered. It came to the extent Killua sometimes believed Gon was making it up. It's started late at night, with him kicking or punching blindly. So Gon would kick him back. Killua would kick harder. So Gon would yell at him. Only then -and quite immediate- Killua would wake up. Alert as Gon barely achieved under similar circumstances. The silver-haired boy would scan for danger or something amiss in the blink of an eye. At its absence it he'd give a blank stare to Gon's vexed face. And he would say "stop moving" and turn to his side – irritatingly too similar to how cats plop on the floor. It could be interpreted as a gesture of resignation- weren't it the case that the second his cheek touched the pillow Killua was fast asleep again. Just like that. It gave Gon murderous thoughts every other night.

Sob.

That was a distinct sob. Gon awoke completely. "Killua?"

He observed the boy... and he took his shoulder. Killua winced and turned over, with a sharp intake of breath, it was almost scary. Gon stared at him perplexed. He was now lying on his back, only his head tossed to one side, his eyes tightly shut. All his limbs tensed, as if paralyzed, his breathing hitched.

Gon didn't like it. "Killua?" he called gently. He took one of the silver hair strands from his temple. Killua's brow creased. Gon gently placed a hand on his forehead.

"Killua, wake up"

"No" Killua tossed away from his touch, his voice was low, heavily doused in sleep.

"No what? Don't you 'no' me, you have to wake up Killu. Wake up" Gon yawned. No results. He decided to shake him

It was a bad idea. At contact the boy suddenly stopped breathing. Before hitting away Gon, his arm covering his chest. "St-stop" he mumbled inaudibly, thrashing, gasping for air in rise... "Stop... n-no..." his head turned sharp to one side. Gon called him and tried again. But the boy slapped Gon's hand so fast, Gon was entirely shaken awake.

"Don't"

And then Gon saw it. The light barely cleared his silhouette and expression, but there was... wetness down his cheek. Gon's stomach turned.

"Killua!" He'd never seen Killua like this. He'd never seen Killua cry, it did not happen, he hated it and he yelled his name -panic- he wouldn't wake up, he was only thrashing more and more.

"Killua!"

"NO"

"Killua!"

Gon slapped him.

Well, tried. But very-very disturbingly, he was stopped by Killua's grip. Yet he was still asleep. Gon yelled back his name, Killua wake up why -won't -you -wake up- and that's when he noticed the boy's hand clawed. The sharp nails sunk into the mattress and Gon felt it was all surreal. He reacted quickly taking hold of his killing arm with strength, afraid Killua could hurt himself- and in the grip he tried to stop his trashing "KILLUA! Wake up! Wake up, KI-LLU-A! KI-LLU-A" Gon would
not stop until the boy woke up—this was horrible to watch—he couldn't, his voice was trespassed in pain, he refused and yelled his name—.

"N-NO—" Killua cried and struck him in the chin with his elbow painfully—

"KILLU-ITS GON! It's me! Wake up!" he shook the boy vehemently, but then Killua's other hand flew to clasp the mattress tightly at his side, his head thrown to one side. "Don't..." he was barely breathing "...please"

Hate. Gon felt hate at the words. "KILLUA WAKE UP- KILLUA WA-" but then Killua screamed in his arms. Like never before. His voice hoarse—the claws buried in his arm and Gon cringed but he did not let go, he felt desperate, he had to get through and he howled KILLUA- KILLUA- He called his name over and over but it was deafened by Killua's scraped cries—his buried nails hurt and Gon cursed messily trying to lock him to immobility. His friend thrashed violently in his arms fighting but Gon did not let go.

"WAKE UP!"

"NOOOOOO"

"KILLUAAA"

…But…just as sudden, the boy's body seemed to go limp in his arms.

Killu?

The boy was still breathing loudly; his knees raised to his chest. Gon could see blood on Killua's bottom lip. To see it hurt more than a physical wound. Gon still held the pale arm in his hand, his own heart was beating loudly at his mouth. He inhaled air. Afraid. As slowly as he could he took the sunk in shoulders.

"Killua?"

Even though there was no response Gon, took a risk. He slowly slipped his arm across Killua's back to lift him from his locked position...

"Hey…it's ok Killu"

The boy then- "Gon" a whisper.

"Killu! It's me...

His limbs relaxed. He seemed to feel Gons' scent.

Killua's body was so cold. Gon slowly took his weight, resting Killua's head on his neck. His killer-hand was back to normal, his entire body seemed limp as if dead, as if a rag. Gon let his grip on the pale arm go, to embrace Killua…slowly taking entirely all his dead weight, he was too cold.

"It's me... Killu"

"...Gon" he whispered.

"Shhhhh... It's me... It's ok Killu...You are ok…"

He could feel Killua's scent as well and his fogged breath, but he was not heaving anymore, just breathing slowly against his neck. Gon held him for long minutes… feeling he never wanted to let
Go...

Then he picked a faint murmur against his shoulder

"We scape byboat…"

"What?"

Realization struck him. Killua hadn't opened his eyes...

"Killua? Are you there? Look at me"

Silence... he mumbled again something. Gon… hesitated…then caressed the silver hair. The boy did not flinch.

Gon for some reason had thought he'd finally waken Killua up. But he hadn't. He held him still, some sort of inconceivable need for hearing each calming breath, each heartbeat soothing his own, checking again and again if he was all right… It was odd a long-lasting sense of failure pervaded, he felt he hadn't been able to protect, and now he was unable to let go… Even long after Killua was breathing evenly and sleeping soundly on his shoulder, he wasn't able to let him go. He couldn't shake the screams.

...

Hours passed before Gon woke up again. Realizing he'd dozed off, his head bent in an awkward position. Killua was sprawled over him, his face hidden in the crook of Gon's elbow.

He slowly unraveled Killua from him and pulled them inside the covers. Killua wasn't cold anymore, which was good...

Killua...he wouldn't let Gon's shirt go, grasped in one hand. So he let his head rest on his chest. Gon ran his fingers through the silver strands, afraid, seeking the warmth of his body, snuggling against him. Killua's scent, he could breathe it forever…He felt safe… so safe there…

But he couldn't shake the screams…

* * * * *

The first color the child saw was a blurry dark white. It was mangled, crisscrossed with shadows. So he raised his head but it weighed like a stone. Pain. The vision slowly tuned on and off to what seemed bed sheets. White bed sheets, crumpled bed sheets in between his hands, but then he could barely think. His body was becoming aware to his conscious mind. He groaned.

The child was spoken at. But his head hurt way too much for comprehension, it was pulsing like a horrifying loud drum against his forehead. It hurt and he realized his cheek had fallen against the sheets again. An unpleasant shiver ran cold through his shoulder blades. Naked…he… was naked...

Wake up Killua. A commanding distant voice.

He blinked at the foggy images many times, unable to focus.

"Wake up. Wash yourself and go to your room" The boy now heard clear.

He tried to lift himself in obey mode barely aware. The world spun in pain. PAIN. He cried.
He was repeated the instruction. The boy tried to move- a knee to his right- but he collapsed. He'd felt -he'd felt his thighs stuck together-and-a wave of nausea hit him- they were sticky and mangled in the sheets, it hurt- he did not understand but it hurt-it hurt-it hurt- he was spoken the command but he was heaving, pain, he tried to hoist himself with urgency but his arms could not sustain him and he was heaving, his mouth against the sheets, he smelled the sweat- and the rusty metallic in the air...Blood -

He felt sick- revulsion and he was throwing up by the side of the bed. He barely held himself- he heaved and heaved until there wasn't anymore but saliva down his mouth and he couldn't breathe-he couldn't breathe. He began moaning, the worlds off its hinges, it hurts-it hurts-it hurts- Steely words, they were ordering him to move but he couldn't. His small body began shuddering, he felt sick, he felt feverish. He was lifted in strong arms. He hung limp.

The boy was scarcely aware he was being carried, a door being opened. He was tossed to the floor. It hurt, it hurt- then the bathroom tiles against his shoulder were so cold...

And then a faucet was open and water was pouring on him from the shower, scalding hot.

He was repeated an instruction.

The words were incomprehensible.

The door closed. His cheek against the tiles felt cool, water pooled around him. His unfocused gaze fell on his arms, his head against the floor, the watery red, and the pouring rain was numbing his skin so comfortably. He realized he could now only see the silhouettes of colours in shadows. He felt warm. He had the vague idea Illumi had wanted to kill, to kill him for something he did and he was sorry-he was sorry- it was blurry but he tried to make sense, but now it was all fine because of the water- and it was so warm he wasn't trembling anymore...no...he had gotten it all wrong, it wasn't water, it was his bed... and he was safe in his bed...he imagined nanny at his side...he breathed relieved-water against his lips and mouth, when he closed his eyes.

*.*.*.*.*

Dawn crept through his closed eyelashes.

It was quiet like a Christmas morning… Killua refused to open his eyes, he felt so warm there. He had feared a nightmare or some of that stuff that would give him away-but no- his mind was held in warm silence by Gon's scent... his heartbeat… his skin was so warm...

...so warm...Wait what? Killua stood up with a start, as if burned. He had been leaning on Gon's chest. An idea flashed through his mind of not wanting to touch Gon.

"Killua?" It was early in the morning and Gon's chocolate eyes were candid in sleep.

"Hey" Killua felt awkward. "I-

Gon sleepily turned "ssshh come back I'm cold" he protested groping blindly for the covers.

"I..." Killua decided to confront the inevitable " I drooled over your pajama. Sorry…"

Gon nodded against his pillow "...ri- iight..." He yawned "...I don't... mind" Gon yawned again and turned sluggish on the covers with a peaceful expression.

It was contagious. Killua slowly lifted his gaze, to stare at Gon. He observed him...shamelessly...for
long moments, with a faint smile…but then his heart jolted.

"Gon, what happened to you?!"

"What" Gon spoke against his pillow. But at the silence he looked up and followed Killua's bewildered stare "Oh yeah…” He checked his arm lazily… the four deep lineal cuts a bit swollen but nothing more.

"Where did you get those?! Yesterday on the mission?"

"Maybe" he shrugged sleepy "So what do you think? It is going to prove an endless mission isn't it?"

Killua grabbed Gon's arm. Gon took it away. "It was me” Killua whispered shocked. Gon incorporated immediately, negating with his head.

"Killu-"

"Gon I reckon the marks I leave with my..." His sentenced was left unfinished. His eyes hardened.

Gon downed his pajama's sleeve brusquely . "You know how it happened?” The raven tilted his head, knowing exactly the kind of things crossing his friends mind.

"Gon...".

"Don't. Yesterday, you were having a nightmare-I was trying to wake you so bad, you were…screaming, it wasn't your fault, do you remember?” The raven rushed.

Killua suddenly realized he did remember a dream of being held... but that could not be possible.

"And I attacked you" He spoke empty.

"You didn't. Your hand clawed and it was me who gripped your arm and I couldn't wake you up-You were thrashing-and I couldn't...

"Uh" Killua seemed drained of all energy…He'd wounded Gon. And he could see them neatly knelt. There. One by one, the row of old fears lighting candles to the shallow grave of his past.

"Killu...you were screaming, it was...-"

Killua had sat on the bed giving Gon his back. "I get it." he whispered "Thanks Gon. I'm sorry. We should start sleeping in separate bedrooms" He monotoned like a GPSmachine.

"Killua its nothing. Look" he wheeled Killua to show him his bare arm and the boy winced visibly at contact. Killua closed his eyes.

"Did I-"

"No. You didn't cause me any harm other than this scratch-"

"It's not-" And suddenly there was a rending faint-heartedness that shook his even tone”…I…Gon, I didn't mean to harm you " His gaze lifted suddenly seeking "I swear"

"I know, I was there" Gon caught Killua's eyes.

He broke eye contact. He shook his head. And Killua had suddenly raised from the bed. He paced biting his sleeve, again and again.
"Hey"
"No" Killua cut him. "it's..."

He paced

Before he turned to the bathroom

"Killua"

"Shower's yours in fifteen" A removed tone.

"Hey-no"

"Go... patch that arm"

"Killu -"

But he was gone into the bathroom. Gon heard the lock.

The raven stared at the door. He fell to the bed..

He looked at his arm. It didn't even hurt...

*.*.*.*.*

Killua turned on the water to scalding hot and let it wash through his body- a mitigating relief old as his skin. He slowly slid down to the floor of the bathtub, sprawled as if shot dead. He focused on the falling water. It sometimes helped. Now it wasn't enough.

So that's how it felt when yet another item of the list of worst things in the world came true uh?

Yes , him and Gon, they could battle and punch each other to bloody pulp but that, that was under his control, he would never lift his killer hand to Gon, he was his friend... his best friend, his only friend, his friend in a sense he could never place-and he would never-. Words and loose phrases like "by my hand" "hurt" and "Gon" and the laureate "you'll kill him" Illumi standing in front of him at the final exam as if he was standing by the threshold of the bathroom, banned thoughts now sliding slowly down the tiles with the water, and if this happened now, what was left for the time to come, what if he hadn't struck Gon on his arm, what if he hadn't struck Gon on his arm- and the possibility gouged his world - Words from every source imaginable in his memory now were being rang- those nice old women at Pandora and their taunting words, the anger at his own illusion, how could he possibly believe his own lie of floating through life by Gon's side-Illumi's words- you'll kill your friend -and he knew Biscuit had tried to spur him... but... he knew she spoke the truth...

He inhaled.

He had to endure this ...

For their sake

For his sake...

He had to endure this... and the echoes rang and rang and rang.

*.*.*.*.*
Killua took so long Gon had fallen asleep again in the warm bed, waiting for his turn on the shower. He didn't even notice when Killua came out and left their room. He awoke alone. Which was weird, he was so used to being by Killua's side.

He found the silver-haired boy on the hotel's food court. Sitting on a table, arranging their breakfast.

"I was waiting for you" Killua met him with a sincere smile. No trace of the conflict before could be read on his eyes. Gon felt instantly better. He jumped happily to one chair.

"You Ok?"

"yeah. Sorry I freaked out." Killua's mumbled regretful before bringing again a cheer to his gaze. "So, ready for the weekend?" he asked, dipping his finger in the whipped cream of his latte.

"Yeah. I'm more determined than ever" Gon threw into the air a cracker and caught it with his mouth. But suddenly, doubt clouded Gon's chest.

"God… I don't know if I'll be able"

"You are able."

"You always say that"

"If you don't believe it, then believe me. I know you are able." Killua gave him a vampy knowing grin that straightened his spine. Gon closed his eyes once, and nodded firmly back.

Killua offered strawberries to his friend as he stood up. "Hey, I'm going to call the guys over. We haven't seen them in long, they probably don't know we arrived yesterday".

"I miss them"

"me too..."

Killua was heading for the door.

"You can have my chocolate croissant"

Gon's face ashened "Why? Is someone dead?"

Killua laughed as Gon had desired "I'll take another one from the stand when I return idiot"

His hands were on his muff as he turned and smiled at Gon...

And he was gone through the door.

So Gon ate both their chocolate croissants as he repeated those eyes on his mind.

He'd eaten all of Killua's part of the breakfast when finally Leorio and Kurapica arrived.

"GUYS!"

It was truly rewarding, to see Gon so happy. No. To see him period.

"How have you been doing Freecs!" Leorio greeted him with affection. "Yes! How are you doing? How did the mission go?" Kurapica sat in the table immediately interested.
"It is longer than what I thought it would be!" Gon chuckled, offering them plates as his friends sat.

"And Killua?"

"That fiend…what with him?" Kurapica asked tilting his head

"When is he coming?"

"Uhm…we don't…know?" The blonde frowned confused

"But he went for you, didn't he?"

"When?"

"Ah, no, no you got it wrong" Leorio interrupted nodding "He text messaged me early today to summon us all here"

"And we were late. I mean Leorio was late-" but Kurapica was interrupted.

"Killua...he didn't go for you now?" Gon asked confused.

"No… we haven't seen him since… uhm" Leorio hesitated

Kurapica cleared his throat "since yesterday"

"You saw him yesterday?" Gon was even more confused.

"He threatened us with murder not to tell" Leorio put up a daunting serious voice.

"Why?!" Gon's face was shocked now, for real.

"Leorio! Don't spook him out! No Gon, we threatened him not to tell you. He pulled on us a...joke"

"But where did he go then?"

"Yesterday? To your dorm"

"No, today" Gon spoke distracted, standing up.

"He was eating with you?

"Maybe he went back to your dorm for… I don't know, to get his hoodie or cell phone or something"

Gon stopped himself… "Yeah..." he trailed sitting again. There was a brief silence before he stood again "I'm checking"

"Why are you hyperventilating? He's an independent much"

"like me" Kurapica added staring pointedly at Leorio.

"It's just, today we...had a discussion" Gon tried to be elastic on the term…

Gon thoughts raced, of course he was being paranoid, Killua would laugh about this later. But it seemed that his expression had been distraught enough for the guys to stand from their chairs.

He wasn't in the dorm.
He wasn’t on Leorio and Kurapica's for that matter.

The three had swiftly divided the area of the hotel to search the missing kid.

…

It was now noon. Gon's knees were scraped. They'd searched the entire hotel. And the vicinities. And then the neighbourhoods beyond the vicinities. Before Gon told them about their 'discussion'…

Killua had vanished. Without a trace.

They talked about kidnaps, they talked about trackers.

Deep down Gon knew…Killua had left.

He had left for real.

*

Chapter End Notes

Painful Cliffhanger.

I'm sorry

he left.

Please do not hate me.

SO... here's me updating...! How have you all been?

If you are reading this it's because you are still reading my story... And it may sound weird but the fact humbles me really... always...

I've got updating issues. I take forever to update... I hate myself, loathe myself for being unable to update faster. But at least you got here, to this paragraph ending, which means a lot.

So thank you my lovely readers. On my part, there's nothing new I guess...life as always. Oh yes...I'm trying to win a scholarship to travel across the seas...I did really good at school and now at college I'd already won a scholarship for excellence. But it is damn hard to earn this one in particular... If you all send me your bet wishes, maybe they'll amass to good luck...or motivation- heavens, I need motivation.

I really don't know how I can study. And work . And write...u.u

Interesting facts to feed your reading voracity (I mean, you've reached this sentence): My country suffered an earthquake a week ago. I'm fine. Just a tad scared. We are an earthquakeing country... but we weren't expecting another earthquake in like 30 years (we had a major earthquake four years ago) and it really took us by surprise. This was 8,2 in Richter's scale. The one on 2010 was 8,8... Huuuge.. It is terrible and fascinating and horrible to live in an earthquake prone country. Our entire land has a coastline so
wherever an earthquake strikes, we also suffer the consequential Tsunami. And Tsunamis are devastating. Earthquakes are devastating as well. They were supposed to come in much less frequency...

Always at this catastrophes I volunteer for help - collecting food and blankets to send to the most affected areas, or travel there. If it has of course, not been in my area... The earthquake four years ago didn't even have its epicenter in my area and yet it was strong enough to break buildings, leave us without light or water for a week, along with highways breaking in two and stuff.

The good thing is that we are prepared since little kids for earthquakes. Buildings are made with high security measures to endure them. I don't know why the stupid highways broke but there's a lawsuit (though seriously, 8,8 its a lot to ask of them.) We are taught on safety measures... like Earthquake means run to the hills if you are in the coast.

Updates? Oh yeah, I was nearly mugged last week, but all is fine.

One day I'll have a blog LOL

About the chapter, I'm sorry for it's length. But its as if you had geat to chapters in one! It may sound stupid or meaningless to some but each chapter has uhm ... its like an arch. It extends from beginning to end like a bow around certain themes and I can't break it, like because inside my head they have aesthetic coherence.

I'm reading back and I loathe some of my past chapters, big mistakes in all areas so I'm correcting soon..

If you want to comment your thoughts on this chapter please feel free to review. When I am lazy or down, reviews really do help me update faster. Really.

Now I'm getting on my round to answer PMs( its terrible that private messages acronym PMS Sounds like pmessing! but oh well).

I love to hear you stories, really thanks to everyone who wrote! It's so fun to read you :) There's a particular story I loved about a cat snuggling socks.

Sorry for the huge A/N

I love you all, and send you a great hug. Like a huge nyancat rainbow coloured hug.

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review! and I'll sent a virtual cupcake

Please drop by the archive and comment to let the author know if you enjoyed their work!