It only took Karen a day to realize Louis barely remembered her. Sure, he said he was happy to have her back, but he there was always some distance between the two, and the half avoided gaze he gave her was the same as the ones she remembered he always gave people he didn’t know well. His smiles had that distant shyness, less out of familiarity and more out of a formal politeness.

She didn’t ask him about it, and he didn’t admit it, but being his sister, she knew him well enough. So, after mulling it over and a trip back to the government center to pick up a few things, Karen sat by the bar of Home Base, a dirty album in hand. She looked over to see her brother reading at his desk. She smiled a little. Some things never changed. Other things did.

Louis seemed steadier than she remembered him being. He looked calm when talking to Yakumo or Coco, and there was a pitch in his voice when talking to Marleu that Karen only heard a few times in his life. He had grown up. But it was always possible under that newfound maturity he was still a young man struggling to handle his emotions. She remembered how he could become overwhelmed, but if their talk went in that direction, she knew she would handle it the same way she or Cruz always had. Comfort him, give him some guidance, and a shoulder to lean on.
She got up and approached his desk. She stood for a moment watching him read, then cleared her throat, getting him to look up.

“Karen,” he said, surprised to see her. Karen. Not ‘sis’.

“Hey little brother.” She said, “Getting lost in another world again?”

His stared at her, almost unsure how to answer, before closing the book. “Something like that.” He muttered, putting it back on a nearby pile. He looked back at her. “Did you need something?”

He was so formal, it almost hurt, but she ignored that pain for the time being. It wasn’t his fault that on some level she was a stranger.

“I was wondering if you would look at something with me.” Karen held the photo album out and watched as his eyes moved from her to the thick book. He reached out and took it, resting it on his lap as he opened it. She saw him blink a few times before looking up at her.

“Where did you find this?”

“Back at the Provisional Government Center. In my office. What was left of it, anyway.” She explained. “I know you don’t remember much of your past, or about me. So I thought we could talk about it. Or I could show you a little about what our life was like before… everything.”

She studied his face, seeing the somewhat confused and unsure expression he was trying to hide as his lips contorted into unease. He looked down at the album, at the photos spread out across the page. He frowned then looked up at her.

“It’s strange. It feels like these photos should mean something to me, but I don’t feel anything looking at them.” He said, looking at her for a second before returning to the photos in front of him. He turned to another page, the unease still on his face as he fell on one photo. Karen recognized it immediately. It was from when Louis was still very young, of him, her, and their parents when they were still together. “I don’t know what I’m supposed to get from this, Karen.”

He sounded lost, and a little upset that with memories in front of him, he couldn’t make a connection. She reminded herself that this was normal for some revenants and stepped around the desk, careful not to trip over the piles of books Louis had trapped himself behind. She leaned over to get a better look at the page. One picture caught her eye, a family photo, professionally taken. “Maybe we should start small and work our way up.”

Carefully, she reached under the plastic protecting the family photo and pulled it out. She flipped it over and held it so he could read the messy cursive on the back. It had their names, and she watched as her brother read them, waiting for a glint of recognition. She got it as his eyes settled on one particular word.

“Amamiya…” The word slid off his lips like he was hearing it for the first time, and yet somehow there was a hint of familiarity behind that word. “That’s a last name.”

Karen nodded as he continued to stare at the name. Slowly, his eyes widened, realization crossing his face. “It’s my last name.” He looked at her. “I have a last name.”

“Yes. We do.” She said, smiling as his eyes lit up, the glimmer of recognition was clear. This was the jumping point he needed.

“I - I always knew I had one. Everyone has one, but…” He gasped, covering his mouth with his hand. For a moment, he lost his composure. It was strange to see something so simple get such a
strong reaction, but if everything Karen had seen and heard was true, her brother had lost a lot of himself over the years. She put a comforting hand on his arm, then flipped the photo back over so he could see the people in it. With a last name under his lips, he seemed more interested in the two older people standing behind the young girl and little boy. “Then, these are our parents.”

“They are. We took that picture when you were still very young.” She said, “Unfortunately no matter what I tell you you won’t remember much about your father.”

His gaze broke for a second to look at her, then he turned his attention back to the picture. “I’m guess he wasn’t in my life for very long.”

“Car accident. You were three.” She said, getting a small nod from him. “He was a good man, Mom and I would tell you stories about him. He loved fishing. The one you always loved was about how he would always complain that it difficult to find umeboshi in America and that the plums we had here weren’t right and tasted weird whenever he tried to pickle them. He wanted to take you mountain biking when you got older.”

“I don’t feel like I’ve ever rode a bike.” Louis said. Karen put a hand on his shoulder and watched as he looked at the pictures in front of him. He turned another page, seeing more of him, Karen and the woman. “That’s Mom, isn’t it?”

“Yeah.”

“She’s pale in these pictures.”

“It took a while for her to move on from Dad.”

Karen ran her fingers across Louis’ shoulder, squeezing it a little. He felt tense, like he was not used to the touch, but he didn’t protest or pull away. He leaned a little closer to her. She watched as he continued to look at the photos. More of the three of them as a family, some of Karen giving her little brother a hug or a kiss on the forehead. Many of them he looked nervous.

The next set showed time had passed. He looked a little older, six or seven. One had him in nice clothes with a backpack that was a little too big for him. Karen smiled. “Mom took that for your first day of school.”

“So she did.” Louis said, a smile on his face, as he looked at the picture, then a few others. He then frowned, the gears turning in his head. “I look like I’m ready to cry in a lot of these.” He muttered as his eyes fell on one in particular. His child self’s eyes were red and puffy, his cheeks stained with tears. There was a young girl he recognized holding his hand and giving him a smile.

“That’s Cruz,” he said, taking in the image in front of him. “I knew she was my best friend, but I had forgotten how long I had known her.”

“You two were inseparable from the day you met.”

It sounded right. The thought of Cruz always being with him, it brought a feeling of someone who would usually hold his hand, or talk to him about whatever came to mind after school. His eyes fell back on the picture, deep in thought. “But, why am I crying in this?”

Karen took a deep breath and let go of her brother’s shoulder. She stepped forward so he could simply look up at her as she leaned against his desk. “You cried a lot when you were a kid.” She said. “The story of that picture is very simple. Funny in hindsight, but heart-breaking at the moment. I guess you met Cruz for the first time a few weeks into the school year and she wanted you to come over and play at her house. You never told us, and she ended up knocking on our front
door, asking why you hadn’t come over. You panicked and started crying.”

“I didn’t say anything?”

“You were scared.” She said, sighing as she saw the confused look on her brother’s face. “You didn’t handle being around people well as a kid and had trouble making friends. A teacher said you were just a late bloomer. Mom thought she was doing something wrong raising you, like not having a father messed you up or something. Gregorio eventually told her to take you to a doctor, and they diagnosed you with childhood panic disorder.”

“So I had problems as a kid.” Louis said.

“All kids have trouble in life. You just had a little more than the average.” She said, and smiled, “Honestly you becoming friends with Cruz was the best thing that could have happened to you.”

“Surprised she’d want to hang out with a crybaby.”

“She just thought you were a good person. She’s not wrong.” Louis raised an eyebrow at Karen’s word choice, “Don’t give me that look, you are.”

“I’ve killed a lot of Revenants Karen.” He said. Karen leaned over.

“You’re first motivation when you woke up was to help people. Davis told me,” she said. Louis cast his gaze downward. “You’re a very kind person, Louis. I keep hearing that the others are constantly trying to give you positive reinforcement and you have trouble taking it. Especially from that girl with the red hair.”

“Marleu seems convinced if she keeps telling me I’m a good person, I’ll start believing it.”

“I hope she’s right.”

He sighed and his shoulders dropped. “A lot of things have changed since that day, Karen.”

She nodded. “You’ve grown. Not much physically, obviously, but you’re not the kid sobbing because he was too scared to ask about a playdate after school. Or curled up in bed depressed for two days because you’re first boyfriend broke up with you.”

Louis let those words sink in for a bit, “I guess I had to grow up somehow.” He said, flipping through the photo album again. He saw himself as a teenager, before he started wearing his hair to the side. Still many pictures of him and Cruz. Many had him smiling, either happy, or uneasy. There were a few of him with a boy. “Is that him?” He asked. Karen shook her head.

“No, that’s someone you started dating in your senior year. That breakup was amicable.” Karen said, “He was going to college on the other side of the country and you knew yourself well enough to know that much distance would have been painful for you.”

Louis nodded, and Karen put a hand to her chin. “If I remember right, you dated one other person.” Karen turned a few more pages and smiled, “Yeah, her.”

Louis looked at the picture. It was him at 18 - he knew the age right away - and a young woman by his side. They were sitting in a college dorm room. From how the image was set, it looked like the woman had tried to get him to take a selfie with her. “She’s pretty.”

“You two dated for your first year.” She said, “Mom and I were a little surprised since you had only dated men before, but you were still figuring yourself out. Unfortunately, that relationship
didn’t last long either. You loved her a lot, but she transferred schools after the first year.”

“I seem to have had terrible luck with love.” He said. Karen rolled her eyes and chuckled.

“Well, your first wasn’t the greatest but two and three were good.” She said, “But I think you got frustrated because after she left, you told us you needed a break from love. You focused on your schoolwork and your friendship with Cruz…. Then it happened.”

Her smile faded. She saw the look on Louis’ fade too. Even without saying what ‘it’ was they both knew, even if he couldn’t remember everything. He turned to the next page. There were fewer photos. Some from Karen’s work and the few times he visited. An apartment he didn’t recognize but felt was not where he and his family lived before. Their clothes were dirtier. The lighting was worse. The image quality was worse.

“Yeah…” He said. “I barely remember those days. My most vivid memories are the days before Cruz’… frenzy.”

He fell silent. Karen lifted a hand up as she hugged her arm, trying to find the right words.

“Your compatibility with the parasite was on the high end of the scale, but it took you an unusual amount of time to wake up. It happens. Sometimes, the math is wrong, or the parasite takes longer to acclimate to the body. But I always thought it was also because losing her was too much for you.” She sighed. “The Great Collapse changed everything, and everyone reacted differently to those changes. Not always for the better.”

Louis thought for a moment. “Mom. She died. Didn’t she.”

Karen nodded, a sad look on her face as she focused on Louis desk. “Gregorio saw us like kids he never had so naturally he made sure we were safe. But work piled up, school reopened, all of you had your lives upturned because the privilege of studying what you wanted changed to studying what you needed to know for the new world. The first generation revenants started to frenzy.”

“It was too much.”

“When I revived, I demanded they put you through the process because I couldn’t bear to lose you too.” A snuffle escaped Karen’s lips. She lifted a hand to her hand to wipe her eyes. “I don’t know if I made the right choice or not, but I’m so happy to see you here. I thought I’d never get the chance to speak with you again.”

Louis looked down at the photo album and closed it. He then put it on the desk and got up from his seat. He looked at his sister and pulled her into a hug. Karen froze feeling his arms shaking around her.

“Never thought I’d the chance to too.” He muttered, “When I saw you in the cathedral… even if I can’t remember everything, I just felt sad. It hurt to see you in that place because of my mistake.”

“Louis.”

“I’m so sorry.”

Karen put her hands on her brother’s back. “It’s okay.” She whispered, “You should have never been forced to make that kind of choice.”

He was quiet and continued to hold her, like it scared him to let her go. Eventually he did. She could see the emotion on his face, quiet and contemplative, trying to find his words, but definitely more composed than she was used too. He reached for the album and held it in his hands. “Thank
you. For sharing this with me.” He said, “I think I’d like to know more about my past. Whatever you want to share with me.”

The words made Karen’s heart skip a little, “I’d be happy to tell you whatever you want.” She said, then chuckled, “I have many stories. Some kinda embarrassing.”

“Am I going to regret this?”

She laughed and put a hand on his arm. “It was great talking to you, little brother.”

He looked down at her hand, then looked at her and smiled. “You too, sis.”

Sis. Karen smiled and pulled her brother into another hug, which he returned in kind.

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