### Being Human

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"What makes a human?" Shingen asks. His experiments tend to cause a bit of an uproar from time to time. Never like this though. Then again, the very idea of two Izayas is enough to throw Ikebukuro into chaos. Hachimenroppi!Izaya. Shizaya (Side Pairing: Shizuo x Roppi / Roppi x Izaya). Contains Yaoi scenes as of Chapter 17
Let it be known that Shingen is a brilliant man.

As a doctor and scientist, it is to be expected. He is naturally inquisitive and loves medical mysteries. His curiosity alone has him studying, researching and working for days at a time. His intelligence is sometimes hard to admit due to his playful attitude and idiotic tendencies. Barging into rooms unannounced, constantly asking questions before promptly answering them, and making odd sound effects for everything he does (from flipping through a file to performing an operation). These are only some of the mildly irritating habits he has. Even his superiors find him annoying, but they cannot deny his talent, and his ability of stumbling upon unusual findings. His unparalleled research of supernatural activity and concrete evidence of a few mysterious beings has definitely placed him in Nebula’s top ten commendable employees. He revealed some old observational papers he wrote on his dissection of a dullahan; a mythical headless fairy from Irish folklore, also nicknamed the harbinger of death. The assumption was that this being was a myth, the men and women at Nebula were baffled at this discovery. His research was enough to land him his own personal laboratory within the Nebula Corporation. The higher-ups were more than happy to give him a state of the art
laboratory for all his hard work.

It was not at all because the superiors were sick of dealing with the increased complaints about the eccentric doctor, and dealing with said doctor himself. Probably.

It was a spacious laboratory with exclusive keycard access. It was well equipped with computers, operating rooms and even had a kitchen and sleeping quarters. Shingen allowed a few of his colleagues to enter and occasionally work on a few experiments with him. Lately, he hardly invited anyone to the lab. This unusual quietness and secretive behaviour was more of a breath of relief than a concern to the fellow employees of Nebula. If one would ask them about his sudden change of attitude, they would simply shrug and say ‘That’s typical Shingen, unpredictable as usual’, or ‘It’s best not to worry about it and to let him be’.

Unconcerned peers. A spacious and secure laboratory. Privacy. It was an ideal situation for anyone trying to hide something. And Shingen, a man who’s intelligence is often underestimated, had pulled the strings that would grant him the current circumstances. Because, as a matter of fact, he does have something to hide.

Shingen hummed a tuneless tune as he hooked up the last machine to the body lying on the examination table. The heart rate monitor beeped steadily in the background. The spiking green line reflected off Shingen’s ever present gas mask.

‘Everything is ready’ he thought to himself as he walked around the examination table.

He was more excited than nervous. He has been working on this self-assigned experiment for years, he had been disappointed time and again when his subject failed to respond, and so, he was forced to start again. This time however, he had a feeling that it would work.

He took a seat in front of the computer connected to the EEG electrodes on the subject’s temples. Shingen drew a small breath as his hand hovered over a button. He peered over the screen to take one more glance at the examination table. The subject remained motionless, as he has always been. Apart from the miniscule rise and fall of his chest, and the steadily beating of his heart indicated by the heart rate monitor, the subject looked like a corpse. A mess of black hair covered his head and his bangs framed his face, which was lax and free of any expression. He was skinny and his skin was pale. It looked like he had never set foot outside. Which was a completely accurate assumption; this body has never been outside the laboratory. It was made (secretly) within the laboratory by Shingen himself. Animating the body was the bigger problem. The subject was in a comatose state, unless Shingen could get the brain to function properly, the subject would remain this way.

‘Hopefully, he won’t look as lifeless after this.’ Shingen let out a breath and pushed the button.

[Commencing Start-up Protocol]

[Overtaking Bodily Function Control: Switching to Manual Mode]

The machines that were hooked up to the body that sustained its breathing responded. The machines detected that the body was able to breathe on its own, and automatically switched to standby mode. Shingen rose from his seat cautiously, the previous attempts never made it past this stage. Will it actually work?

[Booting Brain Cognitive Function]

[Brain Activity: 20%]

[Brain Activity: 35%]
Is it working...? The doctor’s eyes flashed between the subject and the monitor, trying to track both of their statuses simultaneously.

[Brain Activity: 55%]

[Brain Activity: 68%]

There. He saw his finger twitch. The subject is physically responding. A good sign. A very, very good sign. The doctor abandoned his seat behind the monitor in favour of watching the boy up close by the examination table.

[Brain Activity 76%]

[Brain Activity: 83%]

His pupils were dancing beneath his eyelids, his eyebrows twitched. The doctor’s breath stilled as he watched the boy’s whole face grimace and as he parted his lips to let out a soft groan.

[Brain Activity: 100%]

The boy opened his eyes and quickly shut them from the harsh light. He raised a hand to shield his eyes from the light above, he turned away and focused on the less blinding machines at his bedside, then to the doctor standing next to him.

The creator and the creation locked eyes for the first time. The doctor recognized that warm blossoming feeling in his chest as pride. It wasn’t a completely foreign feeling, though he only felt it on two previous occasions. Once when he landed a date with the most sought after girl on campus and second when he first held his newborn son.

Kishitani Shingen smiled from beneath his mask, “It’s nice to finally meet you”

The boy remained silent, and gazed at the doctor with his ruby red eyes.

The first few days was filled with body examinations and checkups. As soon as he confirmed the boy was working properly, Shingen began teaching his creation how to read, write and speak. He taught him English first, being the most complicated language, and then taught him Japanese, his native tongue for convenience’s sake. After he gotten use to both languages and was able to communicate properly, the doctor started broadening his teaching regimen. Shingen instructed him on grade school level math, science, social studies, music and other subjects. He assignned him booklets for homework for each.

His young pupil started slow, but finished the assigned work quicker than anticipated. Surprised, the doctor gave him slightly more advanced workbooks, and instructed him to complete on his own. His pupil looked slightly annoyed at the seemingly never-ending cycle of work, but took his books to a table and resumed working. Shingen looked over his work and found minimal mistakes, but for the most part, the boy understood what he was doing. The man felt another wave of pride at the boy’s accomplishment, it was a nice feeling, and it came more often as of late; it was like raising Shinra again. He went over to the still working young man and smacked the back of his head with the workbooks. The younger male yelped and spun around to stare incredulously at his attacker.
“W-what was that for?!?”

“You made some mistakes on these. Review them, and learn from your errors.” Shingen sang in an annoyingly cheerful tone.

The young man scowled at the older man, and snatched the book from his grasp. The doctor simply chuckled and said “No need to pout, work is not a man’s punishment my boy, but a stepladder towards greater rewards”

The younger man just grumbled and turned back to his work. Shingen nodded and went off to do his own work, if he was to keep up his privacy; he needed to finish his work from time to time and keep his coworkers out of his hair.

When he was out of earshot, the young raven-haired boy muttered,

“Rewards? When have you ever given me a reward?”

A day later Shingen’s charge handed back his assigned work and the corrected booklets. Shingen reviewed them, and handed him another set of booklets with more advanced work. The boy glared, but took the work without a word and began working on it immediately. The doctor was surprised when the boy returned a few hours later with a pile of completed workbooks. He took the work and gave him high school level material. It was a bigger jump than what he had planned on giving him, but the boy was clearly getting bored and he seemed to be handling the workload easily, so he decided to quicken the pace. Again, the younger boy took his work, albeit a little forcefully, and headed back to his usual spot to work.

Over the next few days Shingen noticed the boy began to finish his work at a quicker rate and complete them with less mistakes. It was fascinating. It seems as though his academic progress has been increasing at an exponential rate. When his pupil handed back his university level calculus workbooks, Shingen congratulated him for the completion of his home-schooled education.

“Excellent! I wasn’t expecting these back so soon. You’ve done well my boy. Though I do find it odd; the more advanced work I hand to you, the quicker you complete it.”

The boy in question just shrugged and rubbed the back of his neck, “I guess once I understood the basic stuff, the advanced work just used the same concept but applied it differently...I think” he paused as his eyes glazed over in thought. “But still...I feel like I already knew some of these things, and I’m slowly starting to remember. It’s strange.”

Shingen’s gas mask covered his surprise from showing, “Is that so? That is an...interesting revelation”

The younger man looked at Shingen in confusion, “But, you told me that you created me. If that’s the case, then isn’t it strange that I remember things that I shouldn’t? Why aren’t you surprised about this?” he narrowed his eyes “Did you lie to me again you damn doctor?” he growled as he grabbed the collar of the man’s white lab coat.

“Ah! Oww! Is this how you treat your elders? I’m sure I instilled manners into that synthetic brain of yours- Ow ow! Okay sorry! The reason I’m not too surprised is because I suspected that since I programmed a specific learning function into you, you are already predisposed to this type of
information! Good grief, what is this, jumping to the conclusion that I lied to you? Ow, please let go now, I can’t breathe-oof!” the younger man promptly unhanded the doctor. He watched the older man cough and straighten up.

“I see...Sorry, I guess” he said, refusing to meet Shingen’s eyes. Or where his eyes would be behind his mask.

Shingen studied his younger pupil. He actually lied about the learning function. The only information he implemented into his brain was basic instincts, manners (which he is planning on checking) and a conscience. These were the only things he deemed necessary at the time. He only lied because he didn’t have an answer himself. He supposed he should thank that guy’s good genes. Shingen heard through his own son that he kept a high rank in all his classes, and he was a quick learner to boot. That was the only explanation he could think of. The doctor was very grateful that he chose to take stem cell samples from him.

Shingen clasped his charge’s shoulder, “I believe it’s about time I gave you a name”

The younger man looked up at him in bewilderment “A name? Isn’t that something you should have given to me from the start?” his face melted to annoyance at his own revelation.

Shingen ignored him and placed his hand at the chin of his mask “Hmm, what about Berga? That sounds like a smart sounding name”

The nameless boy grimaced.

“No? Hmm, what about Izumi?”

“...that’s a female name”

“Psyche?”

“...Is that even a name?”

“I really like the name Shinra...”

“That’s your son’s name!”

“That’s true…I can see how that would be a problem. Hmm. I got a good one, Hachimenroppi. Or Roppi for short.” Shingen nodded to himself “Yes, that’s a good name for a smart boy of many talents such as yourself.”

The younger one looked like he was going to argue but paused at Shingen’s reasoning. He felt a little happy at the way Shingen bluntly praised him. “I guess that’s not such a bad name,” he reluctantly agreed, he sounded out the name for himself “Roppi. My name is Roppi”

Shingen beamed through his mask, “This is great! I wonder why I haven’t thought of this earlier! Now I have a name to call you! From now on, I shall call you by your name, Roppi-kun”

Roppi nodded and let his lips quirk into a ghost of a smile. It was times like this when the doctor was semi-tolerable.

“And you can call me Papa!”

“...No”

Pity it would never last long.
Oh, The Things They Tell You Online

Chapter Summary

Roppi gets a few gifts. One of those is...laptop privileges? He meets some interesting chatmates and learns a thing or two about Japanese urban legends. Shingen seems to be planning something as well...

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

It was roughly a month and a half after Roppi was awakened, and Roppi had completed his education that Shingen had setup for him. Shingen had asked his superiors at Nebula Corporation for a four-month long break for his own private research. When they questioned him what he was working on, he vaguely replied that he would let them know when he finds out himself. Already used to his antics, they simply shook their heads and granted him permission with the condition that he gives them a full report when he was done and he does not neglect his regular duties for the Nebula Corporation. As it was, thanks to Roppi's quick learning, Shingen was ahead of schedule. He gave the boy several movies, magazines, books so he had something to pass the time for now. He also brought a newspaper for him every day, and even showed him how to use the computer.

The boy seemed to be in higher spirits with the change of pace, especially when he received Shingen's newest gift.

"You know, that coat actually makes you look even more like your donor"

"My what?" he turned to face the doctor as he slipped into his new black coat, lined with red fur.

"The man who gave his stem cells samples to me so I could make you," the doctor explained as he jot down some notes on a file he was looking though. "Didn't I ever mention him?"

"...no, you left out that particular detail" he deadpanned. "But that's fine, the fact that I'm not completely man-made and I actually have a biological relative is apparently a subject for casual conversation and not a big deal at all"

"Huh, I figured you'd be a little more upset over this...oh, that was sarcasm was it? Hahaha! You almost got me there", Shingen laughed.

Roppi pinched the bridge of his nose. This man probably created him just to see if he could irritate someone to death. It seemed like something he would do. He felt the cuff of his sleeve brush against his face. It reminded him that he was still wearing the new jacket Shingen bought him. The feeling of the fur against his cheek felt soothing and diminished the irritation he felt. It was so warm and soft. He really couldn't stay mad at Shingen after he gave him such a nice gift.

"So, who is he?"

"Hm? Oh, your donor? His name is Orihara Izaya, he is currently an information broker in Shinjuku. He is a shady guy, the worst kind of person you would ever meet."

"How reassuring..."
"He may be an incurable snake, but even I can't deny he's quite the character. You're a spitting image of him. It's a pity that you don't display the same exuberance he does, your company would be a lot more amusing" the doctor noted.

He scoffed. "Well pardon my sorry excuse of an existence"

The doctor didn't reply and continued to shuffle through his papers, humming absentmindedly. Roppi frowned at Shingen for ignoring him. He was also a little annoyed that the doctor thought he was worse company than the 'worst kind of person you would ever meet', but he thought likewise with the doctor's company.

Still, the sudden revelation of a mysterious donor left Roppi with several questions. He knew what the doctor wanted from him; he wanted to create a perfect "functioning" human being with his own hands. After he achieves his goal, Shingen wouldn't have any use for him (Roppi didn't want to think about what would happen to himself after that). However, he was unsure about this donor's involvement. Did he want someone who looked like him? Was he a replacement of some sort? Or was he like the doctor, enthusiastic with the idea of creating a pseudo-human? Roppi had no way of contacting his donor, so he simply asked the doctor for answers.

"About my donor, why did he agree to create me? What does he benefit from this? Why haven't I ever met him?"

"Hm, so many questions. Good to know your inquisitive nature is functioning well" The doctor put his pen down and grasped the chin of his gas mask. "Ah... Let's see, for your first question...hmm, no clue, I pass. Next question...um, right... pass. And for the last question-"

Roppi's eyebrow twitched. "Let me guess, pass?"

Shingen laughed and held his hands up defensively "Ahaha…that's right. Well, I don't know the answer to any of those because I haven't discussed the progress of this experiment with him. In fact I haven't even kept in touch with him since I started!" he proclaimed proudly.

Roppi stared at Shingen in disbelief. "So...he doesn't even know that the experiment was successful? Or the fact that I exist?"

"Nope! Ha ha! Poor fool, he's probably been waiting to hear from me all this time! But the great Kishitani Shingen will leave him hanging!" Shingen threw his head back and laughed.

Roppi lifted his brows at the doctor, and he let out a quiet chuckle. He actually found Shingen's antics amusing when he wasn't the poor soul at the receiving end of it.

"You have a few screws loose, old man. Let's just hope that he isn't the type to do something drastic if he finds out" he said as he turned to walk away "I'm going to bed. Good night" he called out before walking into the room adjoining to the lab.

Shingen's laughing died down and he glanced at the doorway the boy just disappeared though.

'Something drastic, huh?'

It wasn't just Izaya that Shingen was worried about who would do something drastic if Roppi's existence was discovered. With a body made completely through cell fermentation, and a programmable synthetic brain, Roppi was a gold mine to scientists everywhere. If anyone ever got their hands on him, they would take him apart, bit by bit, to understand how such a feat was possible, and exploit it for all its worth. Any fool could see the potential mass-producing humanoids that can be programmed to carry out their will. They could sell the technology to anyone with the right
amount of money. Warlords could make armies of faithful soldiers. Crime lords could make subordinates, hitmen, and freelance workers that work for zero pay. Even politicians could make doubles of themselves for safety or even make doubles of their opponents to tarnish their reputation. The possibilities were endless. Shingen would not allow that to happen. He wouldn't let anyone abuse his research like that.

Unfortunately, that wasn't the only thing Roppi was in danger of. Orihara Izaya worked in a shady business. Any mess Izaya gets into, Roppi would be involved as well. Given that they both share the same face. It was also troubling that Izaya, as an informant, and someone who worked in the underground society, had a lot of enemies; people he has taken down in the past, unhappy clients, rival informants, opposing yakuza members, or just people who dislike him in general. All these people become Roppi's enemy. They'd probably hurt Roppi without even realizing they got the wrong guy.

'Bastards', he thought, directing his anger at no one in particular. Shingen had already considered countermeasures in case Roppi was put into danger or pursued. He thought the process was harsh, but he hardened his resolve as he recalled the potential dangers Roppi had in store. He hoped that the boy would continue to be carefree and happy for the next few days. The boy deserved a break, especially before what Shingen has planned for the next four months. He could only hope that the boy would not break before he was through.

CHATROOM

Kanra: Good Eve-ning~! \(\wedge(\text{'V'})\)/
Tanaka Taro: Good Evening
Setton: Evenin'
Hachimen: Hello
Tanaka Taro: Oh, we have a new member in the chat
Setton: Hello Hachimen-san
Hachimen: Hi
Hachimen: I'm a little new at this...it's my first time using these chatrooms
Kanra: Yeppppp! I found Hachi-chan struggling in another chat, he was so funny, I decided to invite him here, lol
Kanra: By the way Hachi-chan, remember that 'lol' is an abbreviation for laugh out loud ^_^
Hachimen: You don't need to tell me twice!
Hachimen: And who the hell are you calling Hachi-chan?
Kanra: Uwwahhh! Hachi-chan is scaryyyyy~~~
Tanaka Taro: Kanra-san don't tease Hachimen-san too much

Setton: Nice to meet you Hachimen-san, where are you from?

Hachimen: I live in America

Tanaka Taro: Oh wow! That's cool! Where in America do you live?

Hachimen: ... 

Kanra: I already tried asking him that, he's too shy to answer ( ^=^)=3

Tanaka Taro: Ah I see, makes sense...when I was a first timer, I was also cautious about what I said online. Maybe over time you can gain our trust :)

Hachimen: Sorry, thanks for understanding. And also, what does ":)" mean? I keep seeing that everywhere

Kanra: Turn your head sideways dummy! It's a happy face! They're called emoticons. Were you born yesterday or something?

Kanra: And how come you never asked about mine? I've been using them the whole time!

Hachimen: That's because I just ignore most of the stuff you say

Tanaka Taro: LOL

Kanra: Ehhhhhhhh? How mean! ( J ˘Д ` )J

Setton: Lol, If you tease people, they will tease you back, Kanra-san~

Kanra: Hmph! You guys are no fun!

Hachimen: So, If you don't mind me asking, where are you guys from?

Setton: I live in Ikebukuro, Japan

Tanaka Taro: Same here

Kanra: Shinjuku!

Hachimen: Oh, I know those places, so you all live near each other?

Kanra: Yeppp!

Hachimen: I see...what's it like where you guys live?

Tanaka Taro: It's really exciting, there are lots of things to see here, the restaurants, the arcades, the shops, they're all great. I'm new to Ikebukuro myself, and it is really something. It's way better than my hometown, I was pretty much stuck in the middle of nowhere, the only exciting thing I had was my computer (^_^;)

Hachimen: Is that so...that kind of sounds like my situation. I don't really get out much often here.

Kanra: Aww, poor Hachi-chan! You are missing out so much! Never fear! Kanra-chan is hereeeeee! I shall fill you to the brim with the latest Ikebukuro gossip!
Hachimen: Ah...thanks...

Tanaka Taro: There she goes again ( ^_^;)

Kanra: Have you heard of the online gang called Dollars? Or the Black Motorbike? The beast of Ikebukuro? Which one do you want to hear about first?

Hachimen: ...

Setton: Kanra-san, that's overwhelming. You can't introduce all those things at once.

Kanra: I can't help it~ γ(°~°;)γ It's not every day I run into an Ikebukuro gossip virgin! Kya!

Setton: ...you sound like a pervert when you put it like that

Tanaka Taro: lol, you really do

Kanra: Oh you two, I'm only kidding. So Hachi-chan~ tell me, who do you want to hear about first? Hmm~? Oh, maybe you want to hear of the most recent rumour floating around Ikebukuro?

Setton: Oh no ... please don't talk about scary things

Tanaka Taro: Are you talking about the Slasher?

Hachimen: The Slasher?

-Saika has joined the chat-

Tanaka Taro: Eh? Σ(°Д°)

Kanra: Uwahh! Speak of the devil, and he comes running!

Hachimen: ?

Saika: Cut

Saika: I want to

Saika: Cut.

Saika: Cut. Cut.


Saika: I want

Saika: to cut

Hachimen: What is this?

Saika: I want

Saika: Mother
Kanra: Don't worry about it Hachi-chan, this happens a lot (°∀°)=3. Spammer begone! Pyun! Pyun!

Saika: Mom

Saika: to cut

Saika: to love

Saika: Want to love

-Saika has left the chat-

Tanaka Taro: ...

Setton: Scary...

Hachimen: ...what was that?

Kanra: Well Hachi-chan~ Let me start by telling you the story of the Slasher...

---

Roppi (or Hachimen as he goes by in the chatroom) chatted with his newfound online friends for the remainder of night. He learned a lot about the strange happenings in Ikebukuro. Lately, there has been reports of people getting stabbed by a mysterious assailant. There seemed to be no connection between the victims; it appears that the attacker targets people at random. People have started to call this person 'the Slasher'. There have been eyewitnesses claiming to see the Slasher before it attacks. They described the Slasher as a dark figure with red glowing eyes that disappeared as quickly as it came. It was almost like something out of a movie. It was way more interesting than anything Roppi read about in the American newspapers. After his new online friends finished explaining about the Slasher incidents, it was already late. Tanaka Taro and Setton called it a night and logged off the chat room. Kanra stayed back and continued to chat with him for a while before logging off herself. She promised to keep him updated and tell him more about the strange happenings of Ikebukuro.

A week passed by and Roppi chatted with the trio every day. He learned more about the urban legends of Ikebukuro, like the mysterious online gang called "Dollars". Apparently, each member got an anonymous invitation to join the group. No one knows how big the group is, or who they are, or what's their purpose, or who the founder is. It was all so interesting, but what interested Roppi the most was the monsters, like the Slasher, that lurked in Ikebukuro.

CHATROOM

Kanra: The Black Rider is one of the biggest discussed legends I'd say. The rider rides a black motorbike that is so dark, it doesn't reflect any light. He's like a shadow. You can't even hear the roar of the engine when he passes by, the bike only makes the sound of a horse.

Kanra: Lot's of rumors floating around about what's his purpose. Some say he is a "grim reaper", or he is a "hero of justice". But the most interesting rumours are the ones about what's under his helmet

Hachimen: Under his helmet? As in his identity?
Kanra: Sort of~ There are rumours floating around, that the rider...

Kanra: doesn't even have a head...

Hachimen: ...If you're trying to scare me, that was a lame attempt Kanra-san...

Kanra: Pooo! You're no fun (≥ ε ≤ ;) Well you don't have to believe me. There are pictures of him all over the net, but people are still skeptical if the Black Rider is real or not. I guess I can't blame them for believing such a unbelievable existence, can I? v(――v)

Hachimen: It does seem like the type of thing that you'd have to see to believe. It's like that character Headless Horseman from the Brother's Grimm.

Hachimen:...Have you ever seen the Black Rider before Kanra-san?

Kanra: I have. But you won't believe me either way would you?

Hachimen: I'm not really sure. But, I know a few things that you probably wouldn't believe either, so I'll give you the benefit of the doubt.

Hachimen: But, if it were true, that would be cool. I'd like to hear more about the Black Rider, if you hear anything else Kanra-san

Kanra: Hee hee, Hachi-chan likes monster stories? How cute~ any other stories you'd like the amazing Kanra to tell? Maybe in exchange for one of the things you know that I 'wouldn't believe'?

Hachimen: Maybe. You said something about the beast of Ikebukuro before, can you tell me more about that?

Kanra: That guy huh? That beast would be Heiwajima Shizuo. He really is a beast you know~ Horrible temper, insane strength, and absolutely no brain! He's just a big headache, he should just die already.

Hachimen: ...he isn't an ex-boyfriend of yours is he?

Kanra: Ehhhhhhhhhhhhhh? Don't say such disgusting things! Even for a joke, that's taking it too far! (;;≥△≤)

Hachimen: Ah... sorry. I just got that vibe from the way you were talking about him, it just sounded personal

-Setton has joined the chat-

Setton: Evenin'

Hachimen: Hi Setton-san

Kanra: Who'd go out with someone like Heiwajima Shizuo? He's got the charm of a rhinoceros. A stupid stinky rhinoceros! (*´_A´*)

Setton: Ah, today's topic is Heiwajima Shizuo-san?

Kanra: Nope~! I've already explained everything Hachi-chan needs to know about that delinquent! So time for another topic, I'm getting sick of talking about that guy ^_^;

Hachimen: But all you said was that he was strong and stupid…
Kanra: And that's exactly all there is to know about him!

Setton: That's not true. Heiwajima Shizuo is a nice guy when you look past his temper

Kanra: Objection! How can you look past his temper when he gets mad all the time? It's a part of who he is. He's an uncontrollable beast, he hurts anyone unfortunate enough to get in his way.

Setton: But he doesn't mean to hurt anyone, unless they are delinquents that pick fights with him... but you can't say he's a monster if he doesn't like to involve innocent people

Kanra: Even if he doesn't like to, he still does. And if you're unwilling to call him a monster for that reason, then you deny his strength is enough to label him as a one.

-Tanaka Taro has joined the chat-

Tanaka Taro: Hi guys, how is everyone?

Hachimen: Maybe Tanaka Taro-san can settle this

Tanaka Taro: Eh? Me?

Hachimen: What do you think of Heiwajima Shizuo? Kanra-san says he's a short-tempered monster, Setton-san on the other hand says he's a good person. I don't know what to believe.

Tanaka Taro: …well, I'd say they're both right. When I first came to Ikebukuro, my friend told me to stay away from Heiwajima Shizuo-san, the blond-haired beast in a bartender suit. I realized why after I met him, he's super strong. He beat up a gang of thugs in an instant.

Kanra: Told you!

Tanaka Taro: But, Heiwajima-san only beats up people who start fights with him. I don't know him personally, but I know a few friends of his, and I've seen him when he was calm as well. And I don't think he's a bad person, just unbelievably strong.

Setton: It's true, I know he has insane strength, and a short temper, but he...means well

Kanra: HA! Means well? Geez Setton-san! You're giving him too much credit! All that goes through that tiny head of his is "Kill Kill Kill!"

Hachimen: Is he really that strong?

Tanaka Taro: No doubt about it. He's known as the strongest guy in Ikebukuro. He's the last person you'd want to pick a fight with. I saw him punch a guy at least 30 feet off the ground

Hachimen: 30 feet? Are you serious or is that an exaggeration?

Setton: No if it's Shizuo, that's definitely within his ability. I saw him rip a telephone pole off the ground once.

Kanra: He got hit by a truck, and walked away like it was nothing! Seriously, that guy just won't die!

Hachimen: That's...unbelievable

Tanaka Taro: I saw him throw a vending machine during one of his fights with Orihara Izaya. He lifted it without a sweat.
Hachimen: ? Orihara Izaya? You mean the information broker from Shinjuku?

Tanaka Taro: Ehh? You know him? Σ(ﾟДﾟ)

Kanra: Oh my, an introverted boy from America has heard of Orihara Izaya? What a twist!

Setton: I didn't know he was that famous...

Hachimen: Ah...no, I don't know if he's famous or anything, but the guy who looks after me told me about him. He has family in Ikebukuro, that's how he knows about him.

Setton: Wow, what a coincidence.

Kanra: What kind of a person is your caretaker Hachi-chan?

Hachimen: Ah...that guy is an idiot and plain annoying. And also, is it normal for someone to wear a gas mask all day? He may be a doctor, but wearing it even when he's off work, it's just plain weird

Tanaka Taro: lol he sounds like a handful

Setton: G-Gas mask?

Setton: And you said he's a doctor?

Hachimen: Technically, yes, but he does more scientific research, than actually treating people. The gas mask makes more sense for a scientist rather than a physician...but, all day?

Kanra: Hachi-chan is being open~ I feel like I've gotten to know a little more about you ^_^~

Hachimen: Yeah, I figured it's ok to let you guys know a little more about myself, since you all are so open with me. And don't wink at me. It's creepy.

Setton: Um...sorry, I have to go check something. I'm logging off early

Setton: Bye, everyone

-Setton has left the chat-

Tanaka Taro: Wait, so soon?

Tanaka Taro: Gah, she left already...

Hachimen: Did I say something wrong?

Kanra: Weeeell, that's all for me today as well! Bye byehee bii~~~!

Tanaka Taro: Ah! Kanra-san too?

-Kanra has left the chat-

Tanaka Taro: Um, did I miss something?

Hachimen: I... feel the same way =_=;

Tanaka Taro: lol, well it's alright I guess. Anyway, Hachimen-san, did you watch that movie I told you about?
That night, Orihara Izaya did some idle research on Kishitani Shingen and his acquaintances on the off chance that he might be able to put a face to his new chatroom buddy. When he came up with no possible leads, he simply shrugged and turned his attention his usual work.

Meanwhile, Kishitani Shinra tried to calm his beloved Celty. She was convinced that his father was keeping some poor boy against his will. When he asked her how she came to that conclusion, she showed him the log of the chatroom she usually visits. He tried to assure her that it was probably a coincidence and his father wouldn't do something like that... probably. To reassure her, and himself, he called his father to make sure.

Roppi spent his night dreaming of headless shadows and vending-machine-tossing monsters.

Chapter End Notes

Stem Cells vs. DNA. My sister actually beta'd this chapter for me. She told me that using DNA to reproduce a person is a bit of a stretch for today's technology. But she told me that a Japanese scientist team found that using human stem cells, you can actually "grow" organs (they've managed to grow a liver and an eyeball). It took them a year and several trials. Which works out for this story because Roppi's entire body took a long time to create (Shingen got Izaya's stem cell samples while him and Shinra were still in high school). So, thanks to my sister for the info!
It's For Your Own Good

Chapter Summary

Shingen has some plans for the day. What is this uneasy feeling?

Shingen came to wake him one morning. He placed a hand on Roppi's shoulder and shook him lightly until he began to rouse from his sleep.

"Roppi-kun, it's time for you to wake up now"

Roppi groaned and cracked open his watery eyes. He blinked slowly as his vision adjusted to the light.

"Good, you're awake. Put on some comfortable clothing, that means no jacket. We are going to do something different today" he said before he curtly turned and left the room.

Roppi blinked in confusion. That was...strange, Shingen wasn't loud or obnoxious today, he sounded strict and professional. It was disconcerting, but it was nice in a way. Roppi took a quick bath and changed into loose clothing as the doctor asked and headed into the adjoining laboratory room.

He froze when he caught sight of someone else in the room standing next to Shingen. He's never seen another human in person before. He was unsure of what to do. Shingen had told him hide himself if someone else unexpectedly entered the lab. This person, however, looks like they were invited inside. She was a female, he had shiny blond hair that cupped her babyish face. She dressed similarly to Shingen, she donned the same white lab coat and white gloves. The only difference was her gas mask was pushed up and rested on her head, revealing her face. Her golden irises surveyed Roppi with great interest.

"Oh my! He is looking like the regular human being, with all due respect!" she gushed in a strange speech pattern.

Roppi flinched. So this woman also knew that he was an artificial human? He was sure that fact was supposed to be a secret from the other scientists. Why is Shingen suddenly revealing Roppi to his colleagues now?

Shingen nodded "He is by far my greatest achievement. My hard work and effort has paid off immensely as you can see" he gestured towards the woman at his side, "Roppi-kun, this is my wife and colleague, Emilia. She will be helping me from here on out. We will be making adjustments to your form as we see fit."

Roppi didn't like the way he phrased that. "What kind of adjustments?"

Emilia spoke up this time "Shingen and I have the agreement that even though your body resembles a human body perfectly, the human body itself has its flaws, with respect. There are too many ways a human can die. How sad, how sad. The matter of business now is to protect Shingen's hard work. Now, begin eliminating the various ways your body can die, with respect" her smile and weird speech pattern would have been amusing if not for the grim implications of her words.

"And how are you going to accomplish that?" Roppi's voice wavered, giving away the growing
apprehension that he was trying to hide.

"By running you through different scenarios and see how your body is damaged. These scenarios may include, but not limited to, drowning, poisoning, choking, bleeding, suffocation, crushing, and heavy impact. After we analyze the damage you body takes, we will adjust whatever we see fit, to prevent you from dying from each scenario a second time" Shingen replied.

Roppi's eyes widened 'A second time?!

The eye windows on Shingen's gas mask flashed in the fluorescent lighting. Roppi has never been able to see what his face looked like, but right now, he desperately wanted to see what kind of expression he was making, to see if the doctor was just making a sick joke. Roppi hoped the doctor would snap back to his annoying self and say something like "Haha! Just kidding! You really need to get a sense of humour!"

Shingen pulled out a syringe. "Let's get started, shall we?"

And with those five words, Roppi's hopes were crushed.

CHATROOM

Setton: That's strange...

Tanaka Taro: What is, Setton-san?

Setton: Hachimen-san hasn't come on in a while...

Tanaka Taro: Yeah, I noticed too. It's been a little over a week

Kanra: Well~ Sometimes noobies don't stick around for too long you know. Maybe he got bored of us ०_० ०

Setton: Is that so...

Tanaka Taro: You think?...I don't know, he seemed really into our conversations. Especially with Kanra-chan's Ikebukuro gossip.

Setton: That's true. I think Kanra-san turned him into a fan of Heiwajima Shizuo

Kanra: What? I did no such thing! I only talk about the Black Rider and the Slasher, not that dumb brute!

Tanaka Taro: Haha, it's because you won't talk about him that he's curious, Setton-san and myself have to fill him in. Though he is a big fan of Black Rider and Slasher too.

Setton: O-oh really? He's a fan of them too? That's unexpected.

Tanaka Taro: Either way, he wouldn't leave because he's bored. He likes talking about these things with us.

Kanra: Hmmm, you might be right Tanaka Taro-kun. Maybe he's just tied up with work
Roppi woke up tied down to an examination table, exhausted and in pain. He's gotten used to waking up like this for the past few weeks ever since they started the testing stage.

"Project Darwin" they started calling it. All of these brutal tests and experiments. It's the project that will make Roppi stronger to insure the longevity of their scientific research.

'Because, heaven forbid I die and destroy their precious research' Roppi thought bitterly.

What he remembered from yesterday was that Emilia and Shingen had locked him in a room where they set up a machine that shot heavy cannon balls. He was forced to run and dodge every time it locked on to his position and fired. Each experiment Shingen and his wife set up were designed with two things in mind; one was to determine and build on his current physical skills, and the other to record the way his body is damaged during each test. The purpose of this particular experiment was to develop quick reaction instincts and stamina, and they would take note on how his bones would break if he were hit.

When he is hit, he corrected himself; they didn't look like they would stop the simulation until he received some kind of damage.

He remembered cursing both of the doctors watching above from behind the reinforced glass. The two of them were insane for thinking this would help him live longer.

The first couple of minutes he managed to avoid being hit, then the machine began to fire cannonballs at a quicker rate. Roppi was already getting tired from dodging and running without a break. The sudden change in pace caught him off guard. One cannonball clipped his elbow, causing him to stumble. Distracted by the sudden pain, he was unable to dodge the next projectile. He was struck in the abdomen and shoulder in quick succession. He couldn't remember what happened after that. He must have been struck in the head, since it was throbbing in pain as well. His torso, left arm and head was heavily bandaged. He wondered how long he was unconscious. Emilia appeared at his side when he started to pull at his bonds weakly.

"I respectfully request for you to rest" she said, "We are needing you to make the fullest recovery before continuing is possible."

Roppi frowned at her. She was simply concerned about the success of Project Darwin. His well-being happened to coincide with its success. He didn't delude himself in thinking that her kindness was genuine. She was also very annoying. He informed her on many occasions that he could speak English fluently, yet she continued to speak to him in butchered Japanese.

As if sensing his stare, she turned to look at Roppi and smiled. She brushed at his hair and murmured "The face you have is of the handsomest kind, I humbly request you remove the frown with respect. Mama dislikes"

Roppi batted her hand away with his free hand, "You're not my mother" he mumbled. She was almost exactly like Shingen. They were so alike; they both manage to infuriate him with little or no effort.

"Now, now Roppi-kun. Manners," Shingen scolded as he appeared seemingly out of nowhere and
walked over to Roppi's side with a file in hand, "Now that you're awake. We can begin discussing the changes we've decided to make based on the results of your performance"

Roppi couldn't even look at him. It was hard to believe this cold efficient man was the same silly doctor whom Roppi had grown fond of (no matter how much he would have denied it in the past). He wondered if the whole time they spent together was just a charade. He dismissed that thought however. It was a baseless conclusion that he came up with in an angry daze. He was being irrational at the moment. Besides, a stubbornly loyal part of him refused to believe that Shingen didn't care for him.

"We've analyzed the data we've collected" Shingen started, he flipped open the file in his hand and began reading its contents

"Reaction time is average, physical stamina is above average, speed is above average, strength is poor, pain tolerance is below average, hand-eye co-ordination is excellent, spatial awareness below average, resistance to toxins average, and healing time average. Subject is capable of running vigorously for 30 minutes without a break. Subject is capable of swimming vigorously for 20 minutes without a break. Subject can withstand mild and medium bodily impact with minor injuries. Fighting skills are presumably non-existent."

"With this, we've concluded that your body is reasonably capable of defending itself in normal threatening situations, however, you'd still be severely harmed 75% of the time. In extreme cases, you would be killed instantly. As a result, we will continue to train your body to handle normal circumstances, and diminish the likelihood of you receiving damage. If possible, we'd also like to fortify your bones and muscles to reduce the possibility of damage further. For extreme cases, we've decided to take a different approach. Even if you train your body, you may be able to handle strenuous circumstances better, but the chances of you surviving such circumstances are still very low. That is why I have developed a new list of functions to input into your programming. These functions would be put into use as a safeguard in case of an emergency"

Shingen continued to explain how the list of functions worked and how they are triggered. Roppi really didn't care how they were worked. The circumstances that would evoke these 'new sets of functions' wouldn't even occur in the lab that he lived in, apart from what Project Darwin has put him through.

Shingen told him that he wasn't allowed outside the lab, because it was too dangerous. He was safe in here. Then why did he need all of this? It didn't make sense, and Roppi's pain-dulled mind was too tired to comprehend everything.

"I've already created another synthetic brain like your own for these kinds of situations. I'll be using it to test if the program can be incorporated and function properly without affecting the other information and functions that are already integrated in your brain. Until we've decided that it is safe to use on you, you will continue to train as soon as you are healed. That being said, we will take a temporary break from our regular schedule, so get as much rest as you can. We will let you know when it's time to continue," he concluded as he closed the folder and turned to leave.

Roppi grabbed Shingen's sleeve with his uninjured hand, holding the doctor in place. Roppi hesitated, before swallowing his pride and whispering, "Please...no more, I don't need...I can't...it hurts."

He looked at Shingen with pleading eyes, he believed that the doctor cared enough to listen to him. He must realize that all of this was fool's errand. The lab was safe enough, and Roppi could simply pass himself off as a regular human if anyone ever discovered him, no one would know the difference.
Shingen remained silent for a long time. Then he shook his head. "Roppi-kun, it's either you suffer now, or you suffer later on. The only difference is, I won't let you die." That being said, he tugged his sleeve out of Roppi's grasp and walked out of the room. Emilia glanced at the shocked boy before she hurried after her husband.

Roppi bit his lip to stop it from trembling, his eyes started to blur. Why is he being like this? Didn't he see what it was doing to him? Does he even care anymore? He clutched at the bed sheets with a shaking fist. They weren't nearly as comforting as his jacket that Shingen gave to him. He'd curl up with that jacket whenever he felt alone, or when that stupid doctor left the lab for long periods at a time. That jacket that reminded him that Shingen had cared, and it wasn't here to reassure him when he needed it the most.

Before he knew it, Roppi shed tears for the very first time.

And it was over a stupid jacket.

Emilia caught up to Shingen and placed her hand on his shoulder. Shingen paused but he didn't turn around.

"Shingen?"

"He won't be cooped up in here forever, you know. He's going to leave someday, and when he does, he needs to be ready for whatever the world throws at him. He even has that guy's face too, it's all the more dangerous for him. Regardless of his physical appearance or his IQ level, he's still a child."

"Shingen..."

"Bah! He should be thanking me for all this! I'm trying to teach him an important life lesson here! It's his own blasted fault if he doesn't get it!"

"Shingen."

"Sure it's cruel and he'll probably hate me, but it can't be helped! It's for his own good right? Hahaa! After all of this is over, he just might kick my-"

"Shingen!"

The older doctor stopped babbling when his wife wrapped her arms around him.

"He'll be fine"
Hachimen: I really wanted to chat. Maybe I should just vent while the chat is empty?

-Saika has joined the chat-

Saika: Love

Hachimen: I don't know if I should be grateful or annoyed that you turned up.

Saika: More

Saika: Need more

Saika: Love Love Love Love Love Love Love

Saika: To love humans

Saika: I love humans

Hachimen: Love humans?

Saika: Must

Saika: Love all

Hachimen: What's there to love about humans? Selfish morons.

Saika: Love them

Hachimen: Only care about their own goals, and don't care who they trample on in the process

Saika: Strong

Hachimen: That too, all they care about is strength

Saika: More strength

Hachimen: And they'll do anything to get stronger

Hachimen: Wait...are you actually responding to me?

Saika: Want

Saika: I want

Hachimen: I'll just take that as a yes

Saika: Cut them

Saika: Want to cut

Hachimen: What, you want me to cut them? Ha. Like the Slasher?

Hachimen: Slasher is a monster, right?

Saika: Cut

Hachimen: Black Rider, the beast of Ikebukuro, I suppose I'm monster too
Saika: Cut Cut

Hachimen: Can monsters and humans really live together?

Saika: Cut Cut Cut

Hachimen: ...you're not listening are you?

Saika: Mother, Mother, Mother, Mother, Mother, Mother, Mother, Mother, Mother, Mother, Mother, Mother, Mother, Mother, Mother, Mother, Mother, Mother, Mother, Mother, Mother, Mother, Mother, Mother, Mother, Mother, Mother, Mother, Mother, Mother, Mother, Mother, Mother, Mother, Mother, Mother, Mother, Mother, Mother, Mother, Mother, Mother, Mother, Mother, Mother, Mother, Mother, Mother, Mother,

Hachimen: Why am I even trying to talk to you?

-Hachimen has left the chat-

Saika: Must cut the strongest

Saika: Must love the strongest

-Saika has left the chat-

- No one is in the chatroom at this time-

- No one is in the chatroom at this time-

- No one is in the chatroom at this time-

- Kanra has joined the chat-

Kanra: Oh my~ looks like I just missed something interesting.

Kanra: And really, Hachi-chan, you just keep getting more and more interesting

Kanra: You'd be reeeeal fun to play with ~

Kanra: Eh he~

- Chat log deleted-

- Kanra has left the chat-

- No one is in the chatroom at this time-

Roppi began to show more and more antisocial behaviour. He spent most of his time in his room and at times, he refused to leave when they called him for another training session. Shingen had to resort to threatening to use sedatives if he refused to comply. This behaviour was to be expected. Surprisingly, he hasn't physically lashed out on either of them yet. However, he has developed a habit of slapping and shoving Emilia's hands away when she tried comforting him or while she tended to his injuries after training. Emilia was saddened by his distancing, because she truly cared for the boy, yet he still refused to let her near him. Nevertheless, she was a strong-willed woman and she unrelentingly tried to get her 'cute little son' to open up to her. It was amusing to see a woman
fuss over Roppi as if he were a child, when Roppi, in all rights, looked like a young adult.

Shingen hit enter on the small computer in front of him and watched as a sequence of numbers flew across the screen. He was working on the new program for Roppi. The computer was connected to several wires that were attached to what looked like a silicon replica of a human brain. He had two monitors hooked up, on one he was creating the new program to implement into the system. The other monitor had other programs running for the brain to recognize as makeshift body parts and organs. The brain was controlling the "breathing" and "heart-rate" through each program as a real brain would in a regular body. In order to test if the program would have any detrimental effects on Roppi's behaviour, he decided to give the brain the same information and a "personality". Earlier, he tested the brain on external stimulus. Shingen added a camera to give the brain "eyes" and a microphone for "ears", he also added a sensor pad for the brain to respond to touch. He tested through all mediums and it reacted accordingly. Satisfied, Shingen decided it was time to test the program.

He heard someone approaching from behind. Sure enough, Roppi passed by him and sat at the adjacent side of the table. He didn't make any eye contact with Shingen, he simply stared at the glass case that held the brain.

"It's nice to see you outside your room, Roppi-kun"

Roppi didn't answer him, he continued to silently observe the glass case. His eyes briefly sparked with curiosity as a section of the brain lit up.

Shingen chuckled, "As you may have guessed, this here is the synthetic brain that I'm using to test the new program. As you can see, he is functioning well"

Roppi scowled and pulled up the hood of his jacket so Shingen couldn't see his face. Shingen sighed at his behaviour. He acted like such a child sometimes. But, he supposed as he typed in more commands into the computer, at least he came and sat with him. And the fact he still wore that jacket he bought for him, and used it as a source of comfort warmed his heart a little bit. It made him feel that the boy didn't completely hate him for all the trouble he put him through.

Shingen continued to muse aloud and talk to Roppi like how he use to. The only difference was that instead of getting irritated and snapping at the doctor like before, the younger man remained silent, and ignored him in favour of the synthetic brain. The doctor studied Roppi for a moment, and figured out what the boy was thinking.

"I don't have another body to put him inside, if that's what you're wondering"

"Good"

Shingen was taken aback by Roppi's sudden reply. If that wasn't surprising enough, he abruptly stood up, left Shingen without a word, and headed to his room. Shingen blinked at his unexpected behaviour but sighed for the umpteenth time and turned back towards his work.

"Dealing with Roppi is like dealing with a child sometimes. I suppose you're lucky you don't have to deal with him, you lucky little guy" Shingen sighed to the silicon brain sitting innocently in its case.

A few sections on the brain lit up, blinking on and off, as if it were listening to the doctor's words. The doctor chuckled "I wonder if he'll realize the main reason behind Project Darwin, or if he'll forgive me even if he did..."

The brain lit up again. One would imagine that it was trying to sympathize with the doctor's troubles.
"Haha, well as long as he benefits from all of this, I'm satisfied. The sooner we finish this, the sooner Roppi-kun can be happy. So what do you say? Shall we work together to make Roppi-kun happy?"

The brain lit up merrily and the doctor continued to work on the program.

CHATROOM

[Private Chat Mode]

Hachimen: That's why I haven't come to the chat for so long, sorry if I've worried you.
Hachimen: I'd prefer if you didn't tell anyone about this though, I don't need the attention...
Kanra: Don't worry Hachi-chan, I know when to keep my mouth shut.
Kanra: I'm honoured that you decided to talk to me about this, it's hard to deal with household abuse alone.
Hachimen: Well, I talk to you more often, so I figured you'd be the best person to tell

Roppi didn't tell Kanra exactly what was going on, without revealing to much of what he was. Regardless of how much he hated Shingen right now, he knew that revealing his secret was too dangerous for both of them (even to an anonymous chat buddy). Even if it were for petty revenge, it would be crossing the line. Besides, it would sound too far-fetched at this point to reveal that he was a humanoid science project, and scientists were conducting experiments on him to make him practically invincible. Also, he conveniently had internet access so he could angst about it. It sounded even more bizarre than it actually was.

Instead, he told Kanra that he had been dealing with his guardian and his 'new girlfriend' and their combined abusive nature. Surprisingly, Kanra's usual playful and boisterous attitude was set aside as she listened to his story and talked to him seriously. She comforted him and gave him advice and encouragement as any sympathetic friend would. He found himself relaxing as he unload his troubles to his online buddy.

Hachimen: Kanra-san I have a question...
Kanra: As long as it's not about Shizuo again, I'll be happy to answer ( - ^ ＿ ^ - )
Hachimen: Well, that too, but I have another question.
Kanra: Ask away~
Hachimen: Not all humans are selfish, cruel and stupid, right?
Kanra: Hmm... to tell you the truth, they are all selfish in a way, though not all of them are cruel. And everyone does something stupid from time to time, it's what makes them interesting, right? Thats why I love them ^_^
Hachimen: Is that so... I think that's why I hate them
Shingen got orders from his superiors. Roppi finds comfort from an unlikely source. All too suddenly, things start to escalate.

Shingen left his superior's office with his mind racing. He and Emilia had just been assigned to transfer to Ikebukuro. Nebula Corporation had bought Yagiri Pharmaceuticals last April as a cover for investigating reports claiming that they are in possession of a dismembered head. A dormant, yet fully functional head regardless of its detachment from its body. After searching the facilities for any signs of it, they ended up with nothing. Now, it turns out that Nebula has given up the search for the 'head', and now focusing on the 'body'.

Celty Sturluson, the headless Dullahan, or more commonly known as the Black Rider, is currently living in Ikebukuro with Shingen's son. And Shingen was assigned to gather more information about her, along with another scientific enigma, the famous Japanese pop idol, Hijiribe Ruri. Shingen had already examined Celty once before, so he would leave her to Emilia; he was more interested on Ruri's case. According to reports, the girl had incredible strength, and an impossibly quick healing rate. If he managed to get some samples from her, he might be able to find the secret to her ability. As long as her ability is not genetic or created at a molecular level, he may be able to implement it into Roppi.

That was another problem. Roppi. He couldn't leave him in America, it would be too risky. There is no way Roppi would last long without Shingen and Emilia's presence. He was in no means helpless, however, with the limited food supplies in the laboratory kitchen and nothing to do, he would hardly last a week. It would also look suspicious if either of them stocked up on food when they were planning on leaving to Japan for a long period of time. Without food and a lack of human contact, Roppi would most likely wander outside of the lab.

Unless Shingen used 'that', it would certainly solve the problem of Roppi going hungry or wandering out of the lab. However, he never tried to use it for an extended period of time. Also, it didn't stop anyone else from entering the lab. Even though it was a secure personal lab, he couldn't guarantee that his lab will be left untouched during his absence. The higher up's may have their own keycard to access his lab.

He didn't want to risk the chance. He had to bring Roppi along somehow.

Roppi wandered out of his room in the middle of the night, and sat in front of the spare synthetic brain. It's been three months since Shingen completed the program and implemented it into Roppi's own brain, yet he didn't dispose the brain he used to create it. Roppi had seen Shingen talk to it during the testing stage. He wanted to try it out at least once. So he snuck out of his room one night and hesitantly spoke to it. It lit up and reacted when it heard his voice. It was a surreal experience. Surprisingly, he enjoyed talking to it and began visiting the brain occasionally during the night.
The lab was dark and the only lights came from the room that led to the kitchen and the lights emitting from Roppi’s glass-encased friend and the monitors he was connected to. Several areas on the brain itself was blinking on and off, and glowing lightly. Roppi let a rare smile grace his face at the sight.

‘He’s dreaming huh?’

He sat quietly as it blinked and glowed at random intervals. Its radiance was serene and peaceful, he was content with just sitting and watching it illuminate its glass case. Soon, the monitor showed a shift in his ‘breathing’. Roppi straightened up at the unexpected change. The camera fixed on the box blinked and turned on.

Roppi leaned closer and whispered "It's me, I'm sorry if I woke you up"

The frontal lobe sluggishly blinked on and off as if it were blinking sleepily at Roppi.

"I didn't mean to wake you up. I couldn't sleep so I came here. I actually have some good news, I finished another round of hard training today. They ran all the simulations on full throttle"

The brain flashed, the heart rate sped up.

"Don't worry, I'm still alive. And in one piece as you can see. I'm getting a lot better at dealing with the 'maximum danger simulations'. But in the end, I messed up. Even one mistake on maximum would be fatal. Your emergency program had to kick in to save me. It didn't help with the pain though."

The brain flashed again.

"It's okay, really. It's nothing I can't handle." Roppi shrugged.

"I have to stop worrying you," he continued "But I really can't help it. It's too amusing to see you get so worked up for my sake. It's cute"

The monitor showed a rise in 'body temperature'.

Roppi smirked, 'I'm fine though, just talking to you about it, makes it easier to deal with. Maybe it's because we're both the same. We both are made the same way. We aren't human, yet we think and feel. There is nothing different about us, except that I have a body. But really, that doesn't matter."

He absentmindedly traced patterns on the sensor pad as he spoke, completely unaware of the effect it had on the helpless brain. The mock heart rate monitor was jumping at an irregular pace and the breathing showed a large intake but no release. Since all of its functions were all simulated, the lack of "air" probably wouldn't affect him. It just showed how uncomfortable he was. Shingen programmed him with the command to unconsciously breathe at regular intervals, unless he makes a conscious effort to disrupt the rhythm; whether he needs to or not, he would eventually "take a breath".

It was just...difficult at the moment when Roppi was making those distracting motions on his sensor while softly speaking in an uncharacteristically gentle tone.

Roppi sighed and removed his hand to prop up is chin. The brain slowly released his breath.

"Shingen mentioned that we're going to go to Ikebukuro. I've been wanting to go there for a while now. Ever since I've talked to the people in the chatroom who live there. Maybe while we're there that damn doctor will let me outside for once. It's a different country, we'll never know, maybe he'll
be less paranoid. Maybe while we're there we'll get a body for you." Roppi looked up at the brain sitting in its case, "I didn't want you to get a body at first because I thought you'd go through the same thing I went through"

The brain glowed, as if it was trying to tell Roppi that he appreciated his concern.

"But this way those two have your life in they're hands. You can't escape or speak out against them. It's more cruel than anything they've done to me. You are truly trapped aren't you?"

Being with you doesn't make me feel trapped at all Roppi-san.

He desperately wanted to tell Roppi these words. Not for the first time, he really wished Shingen made some way for him to verbally communicate with others. But for now, all he could do was glow to reassure Roppi from his worries. Whether he understood the message or not, it was unclear, but Roppi's eyes softened as he looked at his friend with an unreadable expression.

"When you do get a body, would you tell me what your name is?"

The brain's lights blinked in confusion.

"I don't know what to call you. I never gave you a name." Roppi's eyes widened a fraction and covered his face with his hand. He let out a self-mocking chuckle, "I made the same mistake Shingen made with me, he didn't think to name me until few weeks after I first woke up. His idiocy is spreading." He dropped his hand "But I want to give you the choice to make your own name. You deserve that much at least."

The brain flickered dejectedly. He seemed upset. Roppi frowned at him. "Hey, be a little more grateful. At least I'm not forcing a name onto you without hearing your opinion. I even got a say in my name."

The brain didn't respond. Roppi sighed. "Fine, I'll make a suggestion, but that's it. It's up to you to use it however you like"

This time, the brain glowed happily in response. Roppi watched him glow and came up with an inspired idea. "Your name should have "moon" in it. I've never seen it for myself, but I imagine that the moon glows the same way you do at night...That sounded less corny in my head" Roppi finished off lamely, his cheeks aflame.

The brain positively beamed at his answer.

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**Two days later, Ikebukuro**

Celty watched the three men flee from her with a hint of satisfaction.

After dealing with a mob of fearless traffic police, it was refreshing to see some normal reactions to her shadow manipulation. She retrieved her PDA from the ground and was relieved to find it wasn't broken. If that thug managed to break the present Shinra gave her, he wouldn't have been let off so easy.

Behind her, a boisterous laugh interrupted her thoughts.
"Do you see that you brats? This is the power of adults!" laughed the man clad in a white lab coat and gas mask.

Celty sighed in annoyance. She hated dealing with this guy. If it wasn't for Shinra, she wouldn't have spared the man another moment of her time.

She approached him and typed on her PDA.

[Alright, you've had your fun. It's time to go, Shinra is waiting]

Shingen looked up and nodded. "Ah yes. Let me get my luggage."

Shingen was usually a light packer, he'd normally have one small carry-on bag. This is why Celty was puzzled at the sight of the additional large white suitcase he dragged along with him.

Celty's helmet cocked to the side. She was too curious for her own good.

[What's in there?] she asked gesturing to the large suitcase.

Shingen waved uncaringly. "Oh, nothing special. Just some equipment I couldn't leave behind. Don't worry about it, I won't leave it lying around in the apartment. I'll drop it off at the labs in the morning."

Celty shrugged as long as it won't be a hindrance, she wouldn't mind it. As Shingen set the suitcase next to her bike, the shadows at her feet pooled around it and lifted off the ground. The black mass shifted and morphed into a sidecar with the suitcase nestled inside. A few more tendrils shot out the side and attached itself to Celty's motorcycle. It was a fascinating sight for any regular bystander, but Shingen was fairly use to such sights, and only let out an appreciative hum. Celty mounted her bike and Shingen followed suit. Celty stole one more glace at the suitcase. She didn't know why it unsettled her, but it did.

She drove off into the night. Her motorbike's engine let out a sound reminiscent of that of a horse's neigh.

It was only until Shingen was in the privacy of his temporary lab in the Ikebukuro branch of the Nebula Corporation, and after he swept the lab making sure that there were no bugs, that he opened up his suitcase, revealing an unconscious Roppi. With much difficulty, he hosted the boy out of the suitcase.

It was a bizarre sight. One would think that the scientist was pulling out a dead body. A reasonable assumption, how could anyone survive in a cramped, airtight suitcase for that long? Nevertheless, Shingen connected him with a defibrillator and restarted his heart. Slowly, he began to regain consciousness.

Roppi slowly blinked and opened his eyes. He groaned as he sat up and clutched his head, "Nng, where?"

Shingen made a grand, exaggerated gesture. "Welcome to Japan! More specifically, welcome to Nebula's Japanese branch situated in Ikebukuro!"
Roppi peered around the lab, and found that similarly to Shingen's other lab, it also had a lack of windows. But it wasn't nearly as big, nor as equipped with machinery. Roppi automatically categorized the place as boring.

"When do I get to go outside?"

"Ah ha...Roppi-kun, your face is well known around these parts. It would be unwise for you to leave just yet."

Roppi glared at the doctor "I thought that after Project Darwin I'd get the 'all-clear' to go outside. Wasn't it supposed to prepare me for that? I wouldn't have needed to go through that damned project if all I am going to do is stay inside for the rest of my life."

Shingen raised his hand to silence him before he got any more dramatic "I didn't say you would stay inside for the entire time we will spend here. I simply meant that I need to assess the situation before I can let you outside. There is a lot of hullabaloo going on right now, and I think it would be best if we lay low until the heat dies down. Just by arriving at the city, I'm sure I've caught the attention of a few unsavoury characters. The last thing I want is for them to find out about you, or worse. I'll need to look up on Orihara Izaya's situation as well. If he's stirring up trouble, then there would definitely be people after him, or in your case people who look like him." Shingen gave him a meaningful look, "I'm sure you understand"

Roppi didn't answer, he heard Shingen make similar excuses before. It usually meant that he wasn't going to go through with something, and this was his way of cushioning the blow. As it was, he simply shrugged and turned away. He had a feeling this might happen, that didn't make it any less disappointing.

Shingen took his shrug as an affirmative, and started to ramble as usual.

"On a different note, sorry about the whole stuffing you in a suitcase thing, really. I couldn't just buy you a plane ticket. Besides the fact that you have no identification or passport, if I had to walk through the airport with you, you would have gotten recognized for sure! And thank god Nebula's Private jet has rubbish security. How would I have explained a body in my suitcase? That would have been a disaster. It's really thanks to that new program of yours. How convenient is it that you can-"

"Where is he?"

"Pardon?"

Roppi turned and looked at Shingen in the eye. "The brain you used to create that program. Where is he?"

Shingen was taken aback. "Ah, that. The brain is still in America with Emilia. She's developing a few new programs for him. Oh don't look at me like that, she's only modifying him. He will have more 'freedom' so to speak, with his added features. Primarily the new speaking function Emilia proposed he should have."

"I see, are they coming later?" Roppi forced himself to relax a little, he was uneasy of the idea of his friend alone with Emilia without supervision.

"She's still in the developing stage, she said she will contact me after they are complete, and she will coming to Ikebukuro afterwards. Whether she decides to bring him or leave him is her decision."

Roppi felt inexplicably cold upon hearing that piece of information.
"Well then Roppi-kun, I need to leave and get started on gathering some intel" he pulled out two boxes of take-out food and an assortment of snacks from his bag and set it on the table, along with a laptop. "Here is some food in case you get hungry, and my spare laptop to keep you occupied. Remember, don't leave the lab. I'll see you in two days."

The raven's eyes flew up in shock. "Two days!?" he repeated in alarm.

But the energetic doctor had already left. Locking the lab from the outside with an audible click.

Shingen had lived in the lab with him back in America. At times he would leave him in the lab alone, sometimes for almost a day. Being alone didn't scare him. But being alone in an unfamiliar place frightened him more than he was willing to admit.

But even more so, he mourned the fact that he was here, miles away from his friend. Who may be suffering at the hands of Emilia, with no one to stop her.

The days following Shingen and Roppi's arrival were uneventful.

Shingen spent most of his time out of the laboratory looking for clues as to where he could find his target. He also paid Orihara Izaya a visit, and found him causing problems as usual. Orchestrating a war, of all things. The doctor only dropped by to see Roppi for an hour at a time before he left again. He didn't spend the night at the lab, he slept at his son's house. He couldn't stay longer in the lab, while he was here on an assignment. It would cause too much unwanted attention. Having a temporary lab was nothing like having your own personal laboratory, after all.

Roppi tried to distract himself by surfing on the net, and chatting. He was still getting use to the new non-spammer Saika, and there was a new member in the chat named Bakyura. Chatting was a nice escape, but in the long run, it didn't help at all.

The rest of the week went on without incident. The turmoil between the Dollars, Yellow Scarves and the Slashers had died down. The city seemed to reset to its usually peaceful self.

That was, until one day when Shingen entered his lab, to find it empty.
A certain informant gets a phone call. The news wasn't something he was expecting.

It's gotten so quiet lately.

How boring.

The infamous information broker of Shinjuku typed away at his laptop half-heartedly. His delightful humans seemed to be on vacation. Apart from a few small scuffles and baseless rumours floating around, Ikebukuro has gotten peaceful. Peaceful, serene, and positively boring.

Orihara Izaya huffed as he scanned through another chatroom, "Honestly, do I have to do all the work? You'd think my little humans would be capable of causing a little disorder by themselves-"

"Please refrain from voicing all your thoughts out loud. I may be here to work for you, but that doesn't mean I want to hear every disturbing thought that crosses your mind"

Izaya laughed at his secretary "Ah, but Namie-chan, isn't that what I pay you for?"

Namie continued to sort the piles of paper on her desk. "If that's the case, then you don't pay me nearly enough"

Izaya smirked and leaned further back into his chair. He disregarded her earlier suggestion and continued to muse to himself to irritate his secretary further, "What shall I do? What shall I do? Maybe I should start another gang fight? Or should there be another Dollars fiasco?" He started to spin his chair around as he spewed out more ideas of how to bring the fun back into Ikebukuro.

"Maybe I can set something up involving the Awakusu-kai? Oh, that would be fun! Maybe I can bother Shizu-chan while I'm at it~! Now there's an idea – hm?"

Izaya paused his spinning when his phone suddenly began to vibrate on his desk. He reached for it and checked to see who was calling. His eyebrows rose at the caller ID. He curiously answered the phone.

"And to what pleasure do I owe the Nebula Corporation?"

The caller on the other end chuckled sheepishly "Ah-ha...Izaya-kun, It's been a long time! How've you been?"

"Kishitani-san?" Shinra's father was calling him? Well this is a surprise. "I've been well, and yourself?"

Kishitani Shingen chuckled nervously again. Izaya could imagine the quirky doctor anxiously running his hands through his hair. Izaya sat a little straighter in his leather chair. If something set the nutty scientist on edge, it was bound to be juicy.

"You seem to be a little nervous there Kishitani-san...what seems to be the problem?" Izaya asked in
"Well I am in a bit of a dilemma you see Izaya-kun, and you are the only one that can help me at the moment"

"Oh?" Izaya was intrigued at this point. He wished that the doctor would hurry up and spit it out.

"There is a certain experiment that I have been working on in America for the past few years, in private of course, I haven't told a soul apart from my wife. So far, the project has gone smoothly, I have made a break through three months ago and I brought it over to Japan with me. But this morning..."

"Your valuable work has gone missing, and you want me to find it" Izaya finished. The resigned sigh at the other side of the line was more than enough to confirm his statement. Izaya pulled up some documents on his laptop listing the employees currently working at the Nebula Corporation.

"Do you have any suspicions as to who might steal your experiment?"

"Actually...I think he ran away"

Izaya paused his search. "He?"

"Yes, he stated on several occasions that he hated 'my stupid lab, my stupid voice and my stupid mask' or something like that. The boy was probably getting antsy about being moved to the new lab." The doctor huffed in displeasure and paused for a moment "There are also no signs of a forced entry and the opening to the air duct was askew. It's safe to say that he escaped on his own. The nerve of that brat, I raised him as my own too."

"This wouldn't happen to be human experimentation, would it? How interesting Kishitani-san. You haven't mentioned this particular endeavour before... do I get to hear the details?"

Shingen seemed to consider it for a moment then answered, "I don't see why not. However, I wouldn't quite call it human experimentation, if the subject isn't exactly human. Well... yes, I wouldn't call my subject quite human yet. My experiment is fundamentally trying to re-create a human from scratch"

"Ho? Playing God are we?" Izaya smirked. This was just the type of interesting development he was craving as of late.

Shingen chuckled merrily "Nonsense my boy! It's all in the name of science! I haven't been spending the past few years developing babies over here I'll have you know, that's what women are for! What I have developed is a perfectly aged, 24-year-old human male. Using human stem cells, I managed to cultivate the necessary human parts for the body, the organs, muscles and tissues and such."

"My, have you single-handedly discovered how to clone a human?"

Shingen let out an uncomfortable sound. "Not exactly. The complexities of the human brain have failed to be recreated through cell fermentation. So, I had to develop a synthetic one instead."

"I see. And how exactly does this synthetic brain work?"

"Ohh no, no, noooo you don't. That won't work on me. If you think I'm about to spill my greatest super secret amazing invention, you've got another thing coming! There's no way I'm telling you anything about it!"

Izaya feigned a sigh "Aw, boring. Well then, maybe I'll just leave you to search for your little
experiment yourself" It was a bluff of course. He intended to find this 'Experiment-kun' as soon as possible. But he wanted wheedle out as much information from the doctor while he is still desperate.

"Fine! I know other people who can help!"

Apparently, he wasn't that desperate. Or he is distressed, and not thinking things through.

"Are you sure about that Kishitani-san? You want to keep this as quiet as possible don't you? Going to someone else would only leave me as an open end~"

"...you really are a snake"

Bingo.

Izaya's victory was short lived when Shingen spoke up again "Perhaps I need to remind you that I am aware of the whereabouts of a certain dismembered head. My superiors would be very rewarding if I were to divulge that information. Also, Celty-kun would be overjoyed as well. Though, I can't guarantee you'd survive her wrath after she finds out."

His smirk fell. "Right. I will stop asking unnecessary questions."

Shingen chuckled "Glad you see it my way. All you need to know is that it works. And the boy himself is quite smart and he learns fast. I was so proud! It's a shame that he turned out to be a cheeky brat and he refuses to call me Papa"

Izaya let out a little laugh. "He sounds like a sensible guy"

Shingen let out an irritated sigh and continued, "Anyway, I made a breakthrough a few months ago, when he finally woke up during one of my attempts to animate him. I began teaching him and testing him, and everything seemed perfectly normal. His attitude could have used a little adjustment, but that was something I decided to work on later. I suppose in hindsight, that wasn’t such a good idea"

Izaya agreed. Shingen was the type of person to treat his subjects as experiments, instead of treating them with tact or compassion. He wasn't sure about this artificial human, but he knew humans need a nurturing environment while they grow up, or else they may become deliciously unstable, like how this 'Experiment-kun' seemed to have turned out. How interesting. It seems as if Shingen had some success in recreating a human, both physically and psychologically.

"Ah yes, hindsight is 20/20 isn't it? But don't worry too much, I'll find your little Experiment-kun and have him delivered to you. Though I must say I feel honoured that you came to me, rather than your own colleagues to share this information of your top secret project" Izaya said.

"Oh come now Izaya-kun, technically you've known about this experiment since the development stage. You do play a big role in this whole thing after all"

Izaya frowned at that. This is the first he's heard of this secret project that Shingen was working on, let alone know how this experiment was connected to him "I'm afraid I have no idea of what you are talking about Kishitani-san"

"Don't tell me you forgot! You don't remember back when you were still in high school, I asked you for some cell and blood samples for my 'human assembly' project? I'm disappointed Izaya-kun, for you to forget something this big, it's unforgivable!"

Izaya grit his teeth. "I agree. I would not forget something like that, and I assure you Kishitani-san, you did not approach me with such a proposition."
Silence reined on the other end of the line.

"Hmm, then did I take your samples without your permission? I've seemed to have forgotten..."

Izaya's red eyes flashed dangerously. "You seemed to have forgotten? To reiterate what you said earlier, Kishtani-san, something that big isn't something you just forget" he ground out, all traces of his earlier cheerfulness was gone from his voice.

Shingen chuckled nervously again "Aha-ha...Izaya-kun no need to make a fuss, what's done is done. Right? Besides, the longer he is out there, the more damage he can do to your reputation, given that you both are identical."

"He LOOKS like me too?"

"Well that seems to be all the time I have! Be sure to call me if Roppi-kun turns up! Bye bye then!" and the doctor abruptly hung up.

Izaya stared angrily at his phone at it for a long moment.

He let out a small chuckle.

Then he began to laugh.

And laugh and laugh.

Namie fixed an annoyed glare at her hysterical boss. She only heard one side of the phone conversation, but she had a rough idea of what her boss found so hilarious. Apparently, Kishitani Shingen's 'human experiment' got loose and it resembles Orihara Izaya. The thought was unsettling to say the least.

Izaya came down from his laughing fit and smiled. Fate had a funny way of working, Izaya decided.

"Looks like I found a way to cause disorder in Ikebukuro~" Izaya turned his chair so he was facing the window. His reflection smirked back at him, its red eyes twinkling with mirth.

"And for once 'I' will be in the spotlight"

Outside.

Finally outside. Roppi thought being out would make him feel better than being cooped up in a thrice damned lab. The absence of his friend made it all the more suffocating.

And in a sense, he did feel better. He didn't have to see that annoying bipolar doctor anymore, and listen to his constant muffled babbling through that ridiculous gas mask.

But this was unfamiliar territory, and there were more people out here. And it made him nervous. He'd only interacted with that doctor, his wife, and other humans online; but so far his view on the human race as a whole was that it was better to stay away from them.

His chatroom friends seemed nice enough, but as Shingen unintentionally taught him, people aren't always what they seem. Though he kept talking with his online friends, but never got emotionally invested with them. Talking with humans through a computer screen felt safer to him; it was a platonic and passive relationship, and he didn't have to experience their personal side. Their ugly
side. Their human side.

Roppi didn't consider himself human, neither did he want to consider himself human. Regardless of what the doctor insisted he was to become one day. He knew he was created from unnatural means and functioned differently, and that was enough reason for him to consider himself different from the humans he disliked so much. Based on the chatrooms he visited, the books he's read and the movies the doctor had lent him, humans were confusing, disgusting and sometimes outright stupid. Their actions were ruled by power, money, status, love and other fickle things which values were lost to him. They'd abandon their own morals if it meant they could have more of those frivolous desires.

He'd once told the doctor of his views on mankind. Shingen considered his argument and gave him books and movies that show the "good side" of humans. Clearly, the doctor thought he couldn't tell the difference between the non-fiction material he gave me initially and the fictitious nonsense he gave me afterwards.

His grand escape wasn't as spectacular as he imagined it would be. He'd been planning it since the first day Shingen left him in the new lab. Since he spent less and less time in the lab, due to his new assignment from the heads of Nebula Corp, Roppi took advantage of the man's absences to plan an escape route. The ventilation system seemed like the best choice, since he ran no risk of running into other people or security. After a few minutes of crawling through the tight air ducts, he reached a ventilation grill. He pried it open with one of the scalpels he swiped from the lab. It led him to a loading area for transportation vehicles. He quickly slipped inside a small delivery truck nearby before anyone noticed him and hid behind the palettes stacked with crates. There was a large ominous-looking crate in the back that hid him perfectly from sight when an employee came to shut the door. The truck had let Nebula's facility a half hour ago and was still driving quietly. The sound of the rubber tires moving smoothly over the asphalt, bumping occasionally was relaxing to hear. Especially after dealing with the adrenaline rush from escaping the lab so suddenly.

He clutched at the jacket pulled it closer to his body. He valued it regardless of his later resentment towards Shingen. Which is why he couldn't leave it behind.

The jacket was nothing like anything in the laboratory. It wasn't clinical, it wasn't disinfectant-scented, and it wasn't white. A black jacket with red fur on the linings, warm unlike the thin sheets that he had to sleep with. Why he still clung onto something that man gave him was beyond him. Perhaps it was because it made him realize that there were different things outside the laboratory that he'd been kept away from. He had a vague idea that there was a world outside of the lab, but after seeing the jacket for the first time, it really hit him that there really is more to see out there. Things that are different from the cold, boring lab that he has grown to hate.

The truck slowed to a stop as Roppi pulled himself out of his thoughts and stood up from his seated position.

'Now for the tricky part.'

He could hear two muffled voices coming from the outside of the truck. It was probably the driver and his delivery companion. One of them opened the latch to the back and swung open the door.

"Just let the guys inside know that the delivery is here, I'll just get the-GAH!"

Roppi dealt the unsuspecting man with a swift kick to the face, and jumped over him as he collapsed on the floor clutching his face in pain. A quick glance told Roppi that the truck was parked in what looked like an indoor parking garage, it had several other vehicles parked there already, and it looked deserted apart from the two delivery men. As soon as Roppi's feet hit the ground, he ran as fast as he could and hid behind a pillar, far from the truck, to figure out what to do next. From his hiding spot,
he could still hear the injured man screaming out curses. His partner ran back to his side.

"Oy! What happened? Are you okay?"

"Oww, god damn it! There was someone hiding in there! The little bastard kicked me in the face before I could get a good look at him! Did you see where he went?"

"Shit, no I didn't, sorry, my back was turned. He couldn't have gone far, I'll go look for him"

"No, you go alert Shiki and his men inside that we were attacked, they have cameras all over the place here, I'll check if that bastard took anything."

Roppi grimaced, it looked like he has created some unnecessary trouble for himself. It couldn't be helped either way, he had to get away without getting caught, and attacking the delivery man seemed to be the simplest route. He lifted his hood over his head to conceal his face as ducked behind a row of cars and headed towards the opening at the other end of the garage.

When he stepped out of the garage he was assaulted by the brightness of the sun. He pulled his hood further down to shade his eyes and squinted as he walked briskly to down the street a little ways away from the parking garage and turned into the nearest alley. With more confidence that he wouldn't run into people, he broke off into a sprint in the security of the shadowy alleyway. He followed the alley's twists and turns until it took him to an opening of a busy road.

There were several people walking, talking on cellphones, talking with each other, some handing out flyers. There were so many different people here; tense looking salarymen walking briskly, cheerful schoolgirls skipping happily, a group of thugs loitering around, housewives carrying groceries, and couples walking hand in hand.

Loud music could be heard coming different stores that lined the side of the street. There were cars, trucks, bikes zooming by, making the customary traffic sounds heard in every busy city. It was all so loud and full of life. A big contrast from the empty garage he escaped from a few blocks back.

Roppi froze and backed up into the alley again. He slid back into the shadows, and stared out apprehensively at the lively street.

All the hustle and bustle of the city was too intense for him. He was use to the quiet solitude from Shingen's personal labs in America and Japan.

It was a welcomed change, but an overwhelming one nonetheless.

His heart was thundering in his chest, and he ears were roaring. He was completely out of his comfort zone. He took a few breaths to calm himself. Roppi sighed and pressed his back to the cold alley wall as he closed his eyes to regain some composure. By now, Shingen would have discovered that he was missing, and now those other people from the garage were after him too. He couldn't afford to stay in a place like this, he'd be caught almost too easily. And he didn't want to give up his new found freedom just yet.

That was another thing. He was free now. He was in Ikebukuro. He remembered all the chats he'd have with his online friends who lived here. He can see all the places Tanaka Taro mentioned, he could experience the peaceful but exciting city life Setton's been raving about, he could witness those urban legends he's heard so much about from Kanra.

Ikebukuro was waiting for him. He couldn't let a little noise and a few people scare him.

With a new resolve, Roppi pushed himself off the wall, and calmly walked out into the street. He
merged into the crowd easily. He continued to walk aimlessly with the crowd with his hood up and his hands in his pockets. He was still extremely uncomfortable walking with this many people. But the people didn't pay him any attention, and he started to ignore them as well.

He walked around aimlessly into an open square. There were street performers entertaining the crowd. He walked by and watched a few people drawing portraits and playing music. He tilted his head back and looked skyward, his hood slipped off, finally exposing his head to the sunlight. Roppi admired this new line of vision. The buildings were huge. There was a big screen playing a playing an interview of the famous idol Hijiribe Ruri, (whose name Roppi came across a few times while surfing through the internet, even before Shingen mentioned his new assignment).

It was nice, and he felt surprisingly peaceful. He enjoyed wandering around Ikebukuro and looking at what the city had to offer. Simply walking around with all these people wasn't that bad.

'I guess I can tolerate being around this many humans, as long as I keep my distance. They might not be as bad as I thought...maybe.'
Chapter Summary

A new message spells trouble for Roppi and entertainment for Izaya.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Ryuugamine Mikado walked home leisurely. Now that the tension between Dollars, the Yellow Scarves and the Slashers has died down, his everyday routine has gone back to normal.

At the same time, it hadn't.

He hasn't seen or heard from Kida, nor was he answering his calls or texts. He was certain that the new member in the online chatroom "Bakyura" was actually Kida, but he hadn't responded to any of his private messages. It made him sad to think that he couldn't reach his childhood friend. He wanted to talk things over, and reassure Kida that there is no bad blood between them. Knowing his friend, he was probably was afraid to confront Anri and himself after letting them see him as the leader of the Yellow Scarves.

Without Kida, his everyday life just felt less lively. And honestly, as much as his loud boyish behaviour often embarrassed him, he couldn't imagine going back to Raira for a second year without Kida running up to him after the last class yelling:

"Hey Mikado! Let's go pick up some hot chicks!"

Mikado felt his phone vibrate in his pocket. He absentmindedly pulled it out to check the new incoming message. Mikado wondered what he should do for now to make up for the lack of excitement that came hand-in-hand with the lack of Kida Masomi, when he read the message on his phone.

Mikado froze while he skimmed the contents of the text message.

Apparently, Mikado didn't have to do anything. This message alone was enough to wreak havoc in Ikebukuro.

"Dotachin! Dotachin!" cried out a feminine voice

"I thought I told you not to call me that" Kadota Kyohei sighed as he fixed a stern look at the anime-obsessed duo approaching the van.

"But it suits you so well!" Karisawa Erika grinned cheekily.

"We brought food! Take-out bento lunches for all!" Yumasaki Walker cheered as he lifted the plastic bags in his hands.

The brunette beside Kadota nodded in approval. "Good. But we're eating out here! I don't want any crumbs in my van like last time, hear me?"
"Kay!" the otakus chimed.

The four of them had a quiet afternoon for once, well as quiet as they could be. As usual, Erika and Walker would be loudly debating about with anime character that girl looked like, or which anime that guy over there would be in. Togusa almost got into a fight with some guy who dared to lean on his van when he wasn't looking. Kadota intervened before anything got out of hand.

Now everyone was simply enjoying their food and each other's company. The quiet was interrupted when Walker and Erika's phones chimed tunes of famous anime openings to notify an incoming message. Togusa's phone also started singing Hijiribe Ruri's new song. Then Kadota felt his own phone vibrate in his pocket. He took it out and looked at the new message.

If they all got a message, chances are it was probably from Dollars.

His eyebrows furrowed when he read the text.

Togusa exchanged glances with him, and Erika and Walker exclaimed in shock.

"Woah..this is bad!"

"Dota-chin! Iza-Iza is in trouble!"

"Kadota-san...should we do something about this?" Togusa looked at him expectedly. Since Kadota knew Izaya the longest, he'd know whether or not they should get involved.

Kadota looked back at his cellphone screen and frowned. Izaya wouldn't do something like this. He's smarter than that. There has to be some mistake. Either way he probably needs help, even though he could handle himself, the Dollars was a huge group, and the majority of the people didn't know Izaya as well as he did, and they wouldn't ignore a message like this either, and the numbers alone would overwhelm the informant's skill.

"Togusa, Yumasaki, Karisawa, get in the van. We're going to find Izaya, and get to the bottom of this."

The other three nodded and quickly got into the van. Togusa started the engine and sped off.

A blond haired bartender leaned on a guardrail and inhaled from his cigarette. He blew out a trail of smoke towards the sky and watched as the wispy trails faded to reveal the blue sky. He felt a tap on his arm brought his attention back down to earth where he was standing beside the legendary Black Rider. Though, since he was on familiar terms with her, he identified her by her name.

"Sorry, did you say something Celty?"

Celty typed on her PDA and held it up so he could read her message

[You seem very relaxed today Shizuo.]

Heiwajima Shizuo let a rare smile grace his lips and nodded. He did feel relaxed. After the three-way gang war, everything calmed down. There weren't any annoying gangs prowling the streets causing havoc or delinquents trying to pick fights with him. Hell, even Tom's clients were being co-operative lately. But more importantly, he hasn't seen or heard of the flea in over a week. It was good to be alive.

"Yeah, I guess when 'Bukuro is at peace, so am I"
Celty nodded in understanding.

[It's nice, isn't it? Maybe you should spend your day off doing something more fun]

Shizuo took another drag from his cigarette. "Hm...I can't think of anything to do though"

Celty thought for a minute and began typing again.

[I hear the art museum has new additions to their exhibits]

"Nah, I don't really get all that artsy stuff"

[How about watching a movie?]

"Not too interested in any of the new movies that came out 'neither"

Celty continued to bounce ideas around for a while until Shizuo finally agreed to go see the planetarium in Sunshine City. Not even a minute after they decided their new destination both of their cellphones chimed with a new message.

Celty read though the text before stiffening. Shizuo who was walking beside her stopped completely. Celty turned around to look at Shizuo face, trying to read his expression. It was eerily calm.

She hesitantly typed on her PDA.

[Shizuo? Are you alright?]

"Today was going so well."

Celty tilted her helmet questioningly.

"It was going so well, then he had to go and do something like this. That shitty little cockroach. Causing problems. 'The hell is he even doing in Ikebukuro?!" Shizuo growled.

Celty rapidly typed another message to calm Shizuo before he did anything rash.

[Please calm down Shizuo! It might just be a prank! It doesn't sound like something Izaya would do!]

Her words only served as fuel to Shizuo's growing rage.

"So that bastard thinks he can prank me? Fucking louse, if he's hiding in Ikebukuro I'll find him. Then I'm going to kill him, then kill him, AND THEN KILL HIM AGAIN!" he roared as he stormed off in a random direction.

[Wait! That's not what I meant!]

Celty sighed and erased her ignored message. There was no use. Nothing could stop Shizuo from going on a rampage when Izaya's name was mentioned. She looked at the new Dollars message again. There were many things that were off about it, but she didn't have time to think about it. She quickly hopped over the guardrail and mounted her bike.

Shizuo was on the loose, and he'd maul the city down in search of Izaya, who may not even be in Ikebukuro.

Several cellphones began to chime around him. More followed suit and began to ring and buzz.
People took out their cellphones to check their new messages.

Roppi wondered what were the chances of all these people receiving messages at the same time, but he shrugged it off, he didn't know a lot about cell phones anyways. Still, he brought his attention to the few individuals that were not checking their phones. They were looking around in confusion and bewilderment. So apparently, this was a strange occurrence after all. Roppi didn't mind either way, all he cared about right now was that he was starting to get hungry, so he should probably look for a place to eat. Before he could worry about how he was going to pay, he noticed that there were a lot more people staring at him.

"What? No way!"

"Are you sure this is right? What if it's fake?"

"Hey, isn't that him right there?"

"I think you're right!"

"Dude, I'm going to post a reply!"

"W-Wait, are you sure that's him?"

"That's him for sure! No mistaking it!"

"I'm not getting involved...my friends told me not to mess with him..."

"Hey man, look! There he is!"

"Lucky!"

Roppi was starting to get nervous. All the people who were previously ignoring him where now giving him their full attention. They were all pointing and staring at him, and whispering amongst themselves. He turned to pin a look at a group of high school girls who still had their phones out and gawking at him. Startled by the sudden scowl he was giving them, they ducked their heads down and quickly walked away. However, the group of thugs approaching him were not deterred so easily.

"You wouldn't happen to be Orihara Izaya would you?" the one who looked to be the leader of the group asked.

Roppi blinked at the gang leader, and slowly narrowed his eyes. Orihara Izaya, the man whose stem cells created him. If he was being mistaken for him, then that would mean he resembled him more than he originally thought. Also, it meant that he potentially had a lot more problems on his plate. Like this clichéd group of thugs that stood before him.

"Sorry, you must be mistaken" Roppi curtly answered before turning to distance himself from the group.

The gang leader's hand shot out and grabbed Roppi's shoulder before he could get away.

"You sure? Cuz I remember a guy who looks just like you, dresses like you, sounds like you, and went around calling himself Orihara Izaya"

The rest of his gang made a move to close around Roppi, but Roppi wouldn't let that happen. He ripped himself from the leader's grip and ran away, weaving through the crowd as quickly as he
could.

"Fuck! Get that little worm!" the gang leader roared, as they chased after him.

Roppi could only blame himself for getting into yet another mess. He let down his guard because for a second he honestly believed that maybe humans could be civil.

To: All Dollars members

Sender: Nakura

Title: ORIHARA IZAYA WANTED!

Message: The yakuza are out for his blood! Orihara Izaya has gone and done something over the top this time! He stole a valuable secret from them and killed a few of their guys too. Now, he's running around Ikebukuro trying to hide from them! I hear the yakuza is even offering money for anyone who finds him. The price for his head is 700,000 yen. I wonder who'll get him first? I might just find him and hand him over myself, I got a grudge against that guy anyway.

Izaya grinned at the message he posted on the Dollars message board. It was probably the best, and most amusing way to find Shingen's experiment. It could easily be taken as a joke, but the kind of people he was targeting with this message was the rash, over-confident people who would believe anything they read and would even consider going after someone with an infamous reputation like himself. They would pursue his clone and force him out in the open. And they wouldn't know that the real Orihara Izaya was actually still safe inside his apartment building in Shinjuku, while his look-alike was running around in Ikebukuro. He planned to smoke out Shingen's little experiment, play around with him a little bit, and possibly see what he is capable of. He didn't care whether his twin died or not, but if he didn't make it out of this little ordeal alive, then he deserved it.

Plus, his family was dysfunctional enough as it is, and he didn't approve of another person running around with his face anyway.

Of course, he was also curious of how other people would react to the great Orihara Izaya's moment of weakness. No doubt, his enemies would take advantage of this sudden development and swoop in for the kill while he was vulnerable. He'd even weed out who would backstab him in moments like these, though he already had a rough idea of who was waiting for a chance to dispose of him. It'd be hilarious to see them celebrating his death, and to see the shock on their faces when he turned out to be alive and kicking.

Then he would deal with them accordingly.

He checked his browser. The responses from the Dollars board came piling in.

Sender: Miho

Message: Is this a joke? This is a joke right? Why would the yakuza make an announcement like that, wouldn't that like, bring attention to their secret or something?

Sender: Haruko

Message: I just saw Orihara Izaya near Sunshine 60! He was being chased by a group of thugs!

Sender: Fruits Punch Samurai
Message: Haha! Yess! Serves that bastard right! I hope they beat the crap outta him!

Sender: Kahlua Milk

Message: Izayan won't go down for anyone but Shizu-shizu! Kyaaaa!

Sender: Warden

Message: What does that even mean? _-_-_

Sender: Gaki

Message: I don't know about a reward, but there were some yakuza guys looking around with his picture asking if people if they have seen him...

Sender: Young Leaf

Message: Let's hope he gets what's coming to him then

Sender: Tanaka Taro

Message: So, it's true that he's in trouble with the yakuza?

Sender: MONTA

Message: I see a lot more yakuza on the move than usual...I think there might be some truth to this after all.

Sender: Miho

Message: Come on! You guys don't seriously believe this do you?!

Sender: Rabisan

Message: I see him on Otome Road now! I'm trying to follow him, but he's running really fast, I don't think I can keep up!

Izaya read each and every response.

"Wow, people have spotted him already" he whistled, ever-impressed at the Dollar's usefulness "and he seems to be outrunning them for now" Izaya smirked. But sooner or later, he would hit a dead end. He didn't know the layout of the city after all.

Though the information broker was surprised that the yakuza were actually getting involved. If "Gaki" said so, then it must be true. Still, Izaya double-checked to confirm the validity of the statement. Within a few minutes, he got the information he was looking for. Apparently, his look-alike snuck into one of Nebula Corp's delivery trucks that happened to be delivering some new weapon to the Awakusu-kai, and he attacked the driver when he got out. The security camera managed to capture him as he made his escape, and they mistakenly identified him as Izaya. The delivery men checked the contents of the truck, but found that nothing was out of place. It turns out that the only reason they are currently chasing him is because Akabayashi saw and reported 'Nakura's' post on the Dollars website. Shiki sent out his subordinates to capture and question 'Izaya' as a precaution.

Izaya laughed at the irony.
He walked to the fridge and checked what there might be inside. There wasn't much, so he checked the cupboards. He wrinkled his nose in distaste.

"Doesn't she have anything that isn't instant or canned? You'd think a girl her age would know how to cook for herself..." he promptly shut the door and sauntered back to the couch. He was currently inside his neighbour's apartment. She went on a business trip for the week, so it was the perfect place to hide out, on the off chance that some would try to come to his home in order to find him. He'd still be able to use his own wireless network since his router was located in his apartment on the other side of his neighbour's living room wall. It was an ideal hideout, and his neighbour would be none the wiser when she gets back. As he sat back down on the couch, he checked his phone.

He had three missed calls from Shiki. He ignored them. He was probably trying to settle the matter by reaching Izaya directly and there was no fun in that. Izaya had six new text messages as well.

Dota-chin: [Where are you?]
Saki: [Izaya-san, are you alright?]
Kida: [I got intel saying that you're being chased. What's happening?]
Courier: [You really are in trouble this time aren't you?]
Kida: [Oyy! Did you die or something?]
Kida: [Hurry and reply already, Saki is getting worried.]

Dota-chin wasn't the type to express his concern for Izaya's well being, and he also knew that Izaya was capable of taking care of himself, yet he subtly let Izaya know he was there if he needed help. How sweet. Celty was probably scolding him. That left...

[Don't worry Masomi-kun~ Let Saki know everything is under control. Also, if get any more reports about me, report them back to me thanks~!]

Kida's reply was instantaneous:

[Even if I get a report that you died, would you want me to tell you that as well?]
[Exactly! Masomi-kun is such a quick learner!]
[Shut up and die.]

Izaya smirked as he set his phone down on the coffee table and brought his attention back to his laptop.

"Now, Roppi-kun, why don't you show me what you are capable of?"

He wasn't sure how long he was running. But Roppi was sure that he should have lost a few of the delinquents chasing him. He stole a glance behind him and found that, no, they were all still chasing him. Just some were slower than others.

But they were all annoyingly persistent.

Why were they chasing him exactly? It must be a pretty damn good reason for them to be chasing him for this long. He took a sharp turn down another road. He saw a small alley between two convenient stores and quickly darted into it before the others rounded the corner. He leaned on the
wall and he gasped for breath as he heard the group run past his hiding spot. He took a long shuttering breath of relief as the footsteps faded away. He finally lost them.

"We got you now you little shit!"

Roppi cursed as he saw the slower ones from the pack stopped just outside the alleyway he was currently hiding in. He turned to run out the other end of the alley, and skidded into a halt. The first half of the group that ran past him rounded the store and cut him off at the other end. The second half was behind him, effectively trapping him. For a bunch of thugs, they were surprisingly organized. There were roughly eleven of them surrounding him. He was definitely outnumbered.

"Didn't your mothers teach you how to behave?" Roppi grumbled. "Chasing an innocent bystander is hardly good manners."

The leader sneered "I think my mom would find it in her heart to forgive me...when I collect the reward money for takin' your scrawny ass down."

Ah, so this was about money. Typical.

With only a loud cry as an only warning, both groups charged at Roppi with reckless abandon.

Chapter End Notes

When I read the things Izaya pulled in the novels, I thought, wow. Izaya is really a jerkface (love him for it though). I'm not going to ask you to not hate him for it, but there needs to be a bad guy, and Izaya will take up that mantle for a -brief- section of the story. And rest assured, he won't be the main antagonist for long, and I will explain his motivation behind his actions soon.

Usernames and who they are:
Haruko: Blond-haired ganguro girl (the one who bullied Anri)
Kahlua Milk: Karisawa Erika
Gaki: Akabayashi (yakuza executive)
Young Leaf: Kuronuma Aoba
Tanaka Taro: Mikado
MONTA: Kadota
Rabisan: Man in rabbit suit
Thoughts and Without Thinking

Chapter Summary

The chase continues as a gang of thugs corner Roppi.

"I mean, does that boy even know how nerve-wracking it is to sit here wondering where he went? And it's not the type of fear that comes and goes, it's that kind that fills you up until you feel like you're going to burst! Like BAM! I'm going to burst! Ahh, now I just might burst into tears! That boy of mine, what am I going to do with him?"

Namie was not a tolerant person. Sure, when it came to important matters (like her little brother) she was patient as a saint. But for rambling old men, she had a specific limit. And that limit was breached about ten minutes ago.

"I called you for information, Kishitani-san, not to give you my condolences"

"Ah, and here I thought I could stall you until you lost your patience and hung up. You are quite the formidable opponent Miss Namie, I'll give you that. Should I have been more obnoxious?"

Damn this old geezer.

"If you think I'm out to steal your research, you can relax. I'm not interested in that."

"To trust one of his employee's word. And the former chief of Yagiri Pharmaceuticals at that. You must take me for a fool Miss Namie"

Well of course, she thought, but she wasn't about to say that out loud.

"I'm less interested in the mechanics and more on the rationale" Namie stated evenly.

"Rationale?"

"As a fellow scientist, I know how the process begins. Whenever I begin any endeavour, I have a clear goal in mind. Why I began, why I continue, what do I hope to achieve. I'm just curious, what do you hope to achieve with this boy you have created?"

Her query was met with silence. It was broken a moment later with an unexpectedly wistful tone.

"What makes a human Miss Namie?"

Namie was caught off guard with his sudden philosophical query. She was slightly confused at the seemingly unrelated question, but as long as he was talking, she would eventually get the information she needed. So she replied, "In what sense?"

"In your sense, what do you think makes a human?"

"Well, what makes a human is our distinctive anatomy. The unique size ratio and layout of our organs and skeletal frame have evolved specifically for the way modern humans function. It's a simple question of characteristics."
Shingen hummed, "So, If I were to build a being with the same anatomical structure, then have I successfully created a human?"

Namie frowned "No, I don't think it qualifies to be a human"

"Oh? And why not?"

"If it was made by artificial means, then it can't possibly be human"

"Oh ho, I see. Then by that logic, babies created by unnatural or artificial means such as vitro fertilization or induced labour, are not considered human, am I correct?"

The usually stoic woman scowled. Under any other circumstances she would have stubbornly stuck with her logic. But her own precious little brother had an 'unnatural birth'. Their mother was suffering from internal bleeding during her pregnancy. The doctors had no choice but to induce the labour prematurely with drugs. She had given birth to Seiji during her 32th week of pregnancy. He was so small. A small, delicate, premature baby. When Namie first pressed her face against the glass case box that held her baby brother, her heart was moved. She vowed to protect and love that tiny little angel with all her heart.

She would be damned if she allowed this imbecile to indirectly label her baby brother as anything else than a perfectly normal human being.

"...I admit that's not..." she mumbled and left the rest of the sentence trail off. After all, admitting she was wrong was a very difficult thing.

"That's not a very fair way to judge if one is human or not, is it?" he finished for her. She could almost hear the nutty doctor's smirk through the phone "I'll ask you again Miss Namie, what makes a human?"

She actually thought harder before she answered this time. "I'll stick by my anatomical definition"

"So as long as the body is right, it's human?"

This man was really starting to tick her off. "Why are you asking me this?"

"Only to hear your theory of what a human is before I explain my own. It's always nice to hear 'a fellow scientist's rationale'" he quipped, casually flinging her own words back at her.

So he knew she was digging for information. Playing the empathy card only roused his suspicions. It would be best if she feigned ignorance to his subtle accusation and played along. Honestly, it was really difficult to remember that this man was not as moronic as he seemed.

"Fine, then if the subject passes the anatomic criteria, then it must pass the intellectual and emotional criteria to be considered a human." Thinking quickly was not a difficult feat for Namie. She thought of a definition that would support Seiji. To hell with anyone else that didn't fit into the description. They didn't matter anyway. "Any animal has a certain level of intelligence, but are limited to natural instincts. A human's intelligence is enough to grant them self-awareness. They should have a sense of self-created by their own thoughts and morals. They must be able to feel emotions, it is what makes humans interact with one another. Rational and/or irrational behaviour formed by emotions is a significant human characteristic. Above all else, the subject should know how to love. If they are not capable of that at least, then they shouldn't be called human."

Namie was satisfied with her answer. Seiji was ruled by his own love. He would do foolish things for his love, and he could be reasoned with by his love. His thoughts were consumed by it and his
morals were built around it. She didn't care if there was some sort of discrepancy in her explanation. As long as Seiji was included in it, she would stick to it. The doctor could argue all he wanted.

However, Shingen made a satisfied hum. "That is a reasonable statement. Almost similar to my own. Which brings me to the reason why I made the boy."

"And what would that be?"

"To create the perfect human. Physically, psychologically, and emotionally. Of course the term 'perfect' is my own ideal image of what a human should be. Like how you described, I believe a human should be capable of feeling emotions, and have individuality or a sense of self if you will. I had programmed him with natural instinct from the start, everything else he picked up on his own. I have a checklist of sorts, of the characteristics he needs to exhibit before I recognize him as the perfect human. He passed most of the criteria, but there are a few characteristics I have yet to see in him."

"Why not just 'program' him to exhibit those characteristics?"

"Because a human should learn their own faults and resolve those themselves. Therefore, they should also develop their own characteristics by themselves. To implement my own set of rules and ideas into him would make him no different from a programmable pocketbook! Where is the challenge in that? I'd rather let nature take its course. It took a lot of patience, but the boy has advanced this far by himself, now it is up to him to complete the transition."

"That's all good and well, but now your boy is out loose in Ikebukuro. With absolutely no experience with the outside world, I'd say his survival rate is pretty low right now Kishitani-san. You may want to think of developing a backup." Namie stated the morbid news in a detached, almost bored tone. She had to say it, it was the truth after all. Especially after the mess Izaya created, Shingen's pet project didn't have a chance of surviving. It was better for Shingen to come in terms with that now. Besides, Namie was more than eager to knock the doctor down a peg or two.

"Ah, Miss Namie, you continue to underestimate me. And moreover, you are underestimating him"

He had no time to think, his body simply reacted.

Roppi ducked under the fist that would have connected with his jaw and planted his own fist into his attacker's gut. The man's breath came whooshing out of him as he doubled over in pain. Roppi wordlessly grabbed the man's arm and flipped him over his head. He was sent crashing into two other thugs charging at him.

Three other thugs lunged at him. Roppi leapt onto one's head and used the added height to jump in the air, sending the man toppling to the ground. Roppi descended upon the second man and kicked his head. His head connected with the brick wall with a solid crack, he slid down and joined his fallen comrades on the ground. As Roppi landed on the ground a foot suddenly came into his vision. The third man successfully kicked Roppi in his side. He brought he leg back up to kick him again when Roppi grabbed the offending limb and yanked the man towards himself, smashing his fist into his jaw as hard as he could. Another body hit the floor.

The raven shook his hand and flexed his fingers to ease the pain from that last punch. He levelled a glare at the rest of the group.

The remaining men stopped their advances and exchanged uncertain glances with each other. This guy just took out six of their guys all by himself. It was pretty damn intimidating to say the least.
Roppi on the other hand was silently (and begrudgingly) thanking Shingen and those fighting simulations he put him through. As an inexperienced fighter without real hands-on experience, his movements where far from graceful, but they were effective against these low calibre opponents.

The leader scowled at the sight of his men on the floor and barked to the rest of them "Don't just stand there! Grab him! Hold him down and beat the shit out of that little bastard!"

Two guys seized him from behind and pinned his arms. Now more confident that their target couldn't move, the remaining two lackeys approached Roppi and began beating him. Roppi grunted silently as their blows landed, then one of them planted his foot into Roppi's back sending him lurching forward.

He felt a hand grab a fistful of his hair and lift his head back up again. The leader was grinning down at him. "Well Orihara, I hope I'm makin' my point clear here. You have no chance against us, just come along and you don't have to suffer anymore"

Instead of getting a plea of mercy, the leader got an undaunted ruby-eyed gaze.

"Please" Roppi scoffed, "This hardly counts as pain, your punches are tame at best"

The leader flushed a deep shade of red and opened his mouth to retort, but was cut off as Roppi's head came rushing forward and collided with his nose. The taller man howled in pain and cupped his now bleeding nose.

Roppi took advantage of his shocked captors and grabbed their collars while they were distracted. He smacked both of their heads together with a sickening thunk.

There were two more henchmen, one of them thought instinctively and lunged at Roppi while he was facing the other direction.

There are some moments in the heat of a fight where people do stupid things. Like charge at an experienced fighter with reckless abandon, or turn your back on an underhanded adversary. At that moment, it may seem harmless, but once you realize that you just stuck one foot in your own grave, you wonder what possessed you into thinking that was a good idea in the first place.

But the poor man did not know Roppi, or what would set him off. And that is why it seemed like a good idea to grab Roppi's jacket from behind and use it to fling Roppi into the alley wall. The slightly oversized jacket slipped easily from Roppi's person while the boy himself hit the wall.

The man holding the jacket sneered in triumph. His victory was short-lived as Roppi slowly straightened himself and snarled.

"Give it back"

The man would have taunted him, if only the boy's tone wasn't as cold as ice and the words weren't dripping with venom. There was an underlying promise of pain somewhere there. The man gulped and unconsciously took a step back. The alley was suddenly more suffocating than before.

The man was suddenly found himself on his back staring up at the sky, his face throbbing. 'Wha-?' A fist interrupted his thoughts, adding to the already excruciating pain. Roppi straddled the man punching the man again, and again, and again. The man's friend dove at the crazed boy to save him from the onslaught of violence. The angry raven grabbed the man by the neck and lifted him until the man's feet barely scraped the pavement. He gasped and clawed at his hand, but it continued to squeeze his throat. His movements became weaker, and then, they finally stopped. Roppi promptly
dropped him as he passed out from the lack of air. Out of the corner of his eye he noticed the other man on the floor stirring. His foot came down on the man's face, all movements stopped after that.

Roppi bent down and retrieved his jacket, dusted it off, and put it on again.

And then, there was one.

Roppi returned his attention to the leader who stood there shaking with anger and a hint of something else. During the time Roppi took out his remaining four men, the leader managed to recover from his broken nose and picked up a discarded thermoplastic rod.

He gripped his weapon and swung it at Roppi's shoulder, it impacted his shoulder with a loud thud. Roppi didn't flinch, he continued his advance like nothing happened. His slightly peeved eyes bore into his attacker.

The leader was starting to panic, that blow to his shoulder had all his force behind it, it should have broken his bone! He took a step back and swung again, with more or less the same result. He lifted the rod above his head and swung it down to hit the raven's head.

Roppi caught it before it landed on its intended target. He gripped the rod tightly, spider-like cracks spread out from under his fist until the rod finally broke.

The leader's eyes bugged out and dropped his now useless weapon "W-What the fuck are you?"

Roppi's lips twisted into a self-depreciating smirk "A monster, of sorts" he answered as he whipped out a scalpel from his pocket and plunged it into the man's side. The man cried out and clutched at his wound, his legs were shaking uncontrollably. Then, he abruptly spun and fled from the scene, wisely choosing 'flight' over 'fight' this time.

The raven stood victorious over the bodies littering the alleyway, some unconscious, some too injured to move. He shook his head in disgust. The leader didn't even hesitate when he abandoned his buddies. Humans were despicable. He stepped over the tangled limbs and stumbled out of the alley. The adrenaline was wearing off and the exhaustion and pain was sinking in. He wanted to be far away from this group before the regained consciousness and decided to come after him again. He left the alley without a backwards glance.

A shaken teen wearing a yellow bandana peered out from his hiding spot behind a dumpster where he witnessed the entire brawl. He pulled out his phone and sent a quick text message notifying his former leader of what he just witnessed.

"You modified his body? Why on earth would you do that after all that talk about recreating a human?" Namie said incredulously.

"I admit it punches a few holes in the whole concept when you put it that way. But I am a child at heart. I like to make cool things. And making him a super human is very, very cool."

"That still doesn't explain what that has to do with your goal to recreate a human. He's hardly fit to be called that now!"

"Now that's mean. Are you saying that a person with prosthetic limbs is no longer a human? Or an athlete under the influence of anabolic steroids?"

"Well no, but-"
"Then I see no problem with it. He is just a more advanced form of humans. A human nonetheless. Surely, you can think of a few human or human-like beings that are more 'gifted' than the rest?"

As a matter of fact, Namie could several Ikebukuro residents under that description.

"That's no excuse. If you are aiming to make a human, then make a human."

"Oh, but there is already an abundance of humans in this world. It's such a low goal to aim for, wouldn't you say? Now if I took a completely different route... say, if I made a monster and turn him into human? Change what it means to be human along the way? And that's the challenge right there. What was that saying again? Something like, when life gives you lemons, make orange juice and leave people wondering how and why you did it. Same concept."

This man was a lunatic, Namie decided. His thoughts were so disjointed and sounded downright absurd at times. She was also worried for her own sanity for being able to follow him and agreeing with his logic.

"What the hell is that Izaya bastard doing?"

Something really stank about this whole situation. Kida managed to locate Izaya in the city. He had a few contacts from the Yellow Scarves that pointed him in the right direction. One of them even witnessed a scuffle between Izaya and a large gang firsthand. Izaya took off after remarkably winning the seemingly one-sided fight.

Kida was troubled. Izaya was not the type to get his hands dirty. Orihara Izaya was the type of guy that got off on pulling the strings behind the scenes and watching the chaos he created unfold from a safe distance. He'd leave the grunt work to his own underlings. Like himself, he noted bitterly. He hated reminding himself, but he knew he was dancing in the palm of that manipulative bastard's hand. And there was nothing he could do about it. For now.

Earlier, he thought about taking advantage of Izaya's predicament. News traveled fast in the city, as soon as he heard that Izaya was being pursued, his first instinct was to see how he could use the situation to his advantage. He texted him to confirm whether or not it was true. The reply he got was what set him on edge.

Not only did the informant confirm he was fine, he asked Kida to monitor his own situation as a third person and report any new developments. If that didn't sound like a trap, Kida didn't know what did. If Izaya was really in trouble, he wouldn't ask Kida, whom he barely trusted, for help. It didn't sit well with the young blond. Any thoughts of overthrowing his boss was tossed away. He even dismissed his idea of feeding him false information, for all he knew, Izaya may be waiting for any hint of insubordination to use as an excuse to crush him. If this was another trap, he'd put himself and Saki into danger again.

If he wanted to challenge him, he needed to know for sure that he was vulnerable, and not faking it only to lure him in and cut him down. Izaya was a sneaky, cunning bastard. It is extremely rare to catch him off guard. He was cautious and methodical. Direct and reckless was not his style.

Which brought him back to his current dilemma. What the hell is Izaya doing running around Ikebukuro when the Dollars Group was suddenly after him? In these types of situations, he would go underground for a bit until things calmed down and it would be less dangerous for him. Yet here he was, out in the open, tempting his pursuers within arm's reach. True, he often does the same thing with Shizuo, but he only has to deal with one man. Even if that one man's strength exceeds the strength of thirty men, it is still one person to outrun, outsmart and outmanoeuvre. The Dollar's group
was huge. Dollar's members could be anyone, and they could be anywhere. He couldn't possibly run or hide from them all. They had eyes everywhere. Kida couldn't fathom what he was thinking.

"Why does he even need me to report to him when he is there himself?" he muttered to himself. Even if he was testing his loyalty, he'd be too distracted from dealing with thugs to do anything if Kida stepped out of line.

Unless...it was someone else being chased around.

He double checked with his contact if he was sure that the person he saw was Izaya. He replied back with an affirmative, the one he saw fighting the gang looked and sounded exactly like the informant that sold them information during the gang war between the Blue Squares and the Yellow Scarves.

Kida frowned. His contact was a reliable guy, and had come in contact with Izaya in the past, but he still wanted to see it for himself. Hearing that Orihara Izaya was spontaneously caught in deep shit wasn't something that you just believe.

Plus Orihara Izaya and descriptions like "crazy strong", "took out the entire gang" and "broke it with his bare hands" did not match up. It just didn't sound like the informant at all. It sounded more like Shizuo than anything.

He picked up his speed as he approached the intersecting roads ahead. According to the most recent tip he received, Izaya should be passing through here soon. He sat at an entrance way of a nearby building and waited. It had a high vantage point and gave him a good view of the area, an ideal spot to keep an eye on the incoming pedestrians. He dutifully sent a text to Izaya about "his" recent fight with the gang members while he waited. He withheld the fact that he was currently scoping out the area he would most likely be seen next.

Sure enough, he caught sight of a figure in a black coat briskly walking through the crowd. He followed the figure with his eyes. He wasn't certain it was Izaya. His hood was up and his atmosphere around him was anxious and tense. A far cry from Izaya's usual confident strut. Not to mention, the fur-lining his trademark coat was the wrong color, but he couldn't base any assumptions on that.

It wasn't until someone grabbed his arm, forcefully spinning him around, when Kida actually recognized him. The man stumbled towards his aggressor and his hood fell off, revealing his face. Kida knew that (currently-not-so) smug face anywhere. Izaya scowled and slashed at the man. A flash of silver, and the man unhanded him and hissed as he gripped his bleeding arm. As soon as he was free, the informant fled from the scene. Several other people tore after him.

'That choice of weapon...and that was his face without a doubt.' Kida ran after them. It definitely appeared to be Izaya in trouble. But something still stank about the whole situation.
Chapter Summary

Currently, you should avoid the following people in Ikebukuro; the members of the Awakusu-kai, a distressed Roppi, and a seething blond in a bartender suit.

Shinra knew his father was hiding something. He wasn't sure what it was, but it was something big, he was sure. This morning he had called him from Nebula, sounding distinctly tense, and asked him if any visitors had come. They had not, and Shinra informed him so. Shingen distractedly thanked him and hung up. He'd never witnessed his father so troubled before.

He was acting strange since he arrived in Ikebukuro. Well, more than usual. And Celty had felt it too.

He first noticed it when she brought him to the apartment earlier that week. He knew his father only packed lightly, bringing only the things he would need for his assignment. He would even forgo his toiletries and he would only bring a few clothes; he preferred to buy them afterwards to avoid the hassle of carrying them.

And yet, his father had brought home a suspiciously large suitcase.

"What's in the suitcase father?"

"Ah, just some equipment as I've already told Celty-kun. Fear not, it'll be gone in the morning my boy."

"...It looks heavy, need help?"

"No, no. I'm fine. I'll just drop it in this room. It looks unoccupied. Mine now!" he announced before going in, shutting the door behind him.

Shinra actually did not intend to help his father carry his luggage. He was merely confirming his suspicions. He was now more convinced that his father had something strange in his suitcase. Why else would he go through all that trouble to carry it around? If it was "just some equipment" he would usually ship it over beforehand or have another group from Nebula take it to the labs from the airport. Whatever it is he is carrying, it must be very important to him.

Or maybe he was over-thinking things.

Shingen emerged from his room a few moments later, closed the door and headed to the washroom, probably to take a bath after a long flight.

He exchanged a glance with Celty before approaching the closed door. He reached for the knob and turned it.

Or attempted to. The door was locked from the inside.

Now, he was fully convinced his father was hiding something. This level of paranoia practically confirms it.
Celty offered to open the door by forging a makeshift key with her shadows, but Shinra politely declined. If his father was hiding something, that was his own business. As long as it didn't interfere with their love, he didn't care in the least.

Celty punched him for saying such embarrassing things.

Shinra's mind wandered after that. Imagining a fuming embarrassed Celty had eclipsed the rest of his thoughts.

A knock at the door shattered his blissful daydream that somehow morphed into Celty blushing like a schoolgirl in a schoolgirl uniform. He reluctantly got up and made his way to the door. He opened it and came face to face with a group of sharply dressed men. He focused on the man in the middle, wearing a white suit.

"Mister Shiki, how can I help you?" Shinra asked as he stepped aside to let the group of men inside.

"I have some questions Shinra, and my usual source of information is being unusually quiet. I'm hoping you can enlighten me as to why that is."

"You mean Izaya? That's weird. Usually it's harder to get him to stay silent."

Shinra followed Shiki as he walked into the apartment and sat down on one of the couches. He was Shinra's VIP guest, he had gotten used to treating the place as his own. He even had a spare key to the place in case of emergencies. He still knocked first however.

The rest of the men remained standing as Shinra sat on the couch across Shiki.

The young doctor studied the man curiously, he looked tired and a bit irritated. He must be having a bad day.

"Would you like something to drink Mister Shiki?"

"Tea is fine" the yakuza executive sighed as he raked a hand through his hair.

Shinra headed to the kitchen and quickly prepared some tea. He brought back a tray with a ceramic teapot and cups and a small bowl of snacks. He set it down in front of Shiki and poured tea for the both of them.

Shiki drank in silence, then set his empty cup down and focused on Shinra again. He seemed less tense now, but still as serious as ever.

"Have you spoken with Orihara today?"

Shinra glanced up "No sir, I haven't spoken with him. Is he in some sort of trouble?"

Shiki's brow furrowed. He signalled to one of his men, who drew out a CD case from his pocket and handed it to Shiki.

"It sure is looking that way. I'm at a loss as to how to deal with this situation, I'd prefer to show you, rather than explaining it first. If you would play this, you'll understand what I mean"

He offered the disk to the young doctor, who took it to his entertainment unit. He opened the case to reveal a disk labelled "SECURITY FOOTAGE". Curiosity peaked, he placed it into his DVD player and returned to his seat. He wondered what Izaya could have possibly done this time.

The screen showed an indoor parking garage, an unmarked truck pulled in and stopped in front of
the unloading area. Two men emerged from the truck, one headed to the door on the far left of the screen and the other headed to the back of the truck.

Shinra noticed there was no audio, it would make it more difficult to identify the two men. He tried to make out their faces, but the men's backs were facing the camera. He'd have to rewatch the footage in order to catch a glimpse of their faces.

'Maybe they were Izaya's underlings, and started something with the Awakusu-kai? Is that what set Shiki on edge?'

The man opened the back of the truck and was telling something to the other, when suddenly, a figure from inside the truck immersed and struck the man in the face. The man was knocked over and the figure landed on the ground. He only paused for a brief moment before quickly running off, but Shinra already caught a glimpse of his face. Shinra's mouth dropped open in shock.

'Did Izaya want to die or something? What is he trying to pull? In broad daylight no less!'

"This footage was taken from our security cameras earlier this morning. These men were transporting a rather dangerous weapon. When the boss heard about it, he immediately purchased it in order to keep it out of dangerous hands. We've been trying to keep it's transportation a secret in order to avoid any...complications. But as you can see, we've hit a rather distressing complication regardless of our efforts."

Shiki rested his chin over his laced fingers "We've checked the cargo, and nothing was stolen. But I am worried that he may have fiddled with the machinery itself, or if he took pictures and would sell them to another faction. Either scenario is unfavourable for us. I've tried contacting him directly to settle the matter, and I've even sent some men to his apartment. No luck in reaching him. He is purposely avoiding us."

The bespectacled young man pondered over the new information. He was tempted to ask what kind of weapon it was, but decided if they were going to great lengths to keep it a secret, it's probably best to not ask. The less he knew, the safer he would be.

"I see. But, if Izaya wanted to expose the details of that weapon, I'd expect him to do so in a more subtle, roundabout method. He's careful to cover his own tracks. For him to do something like this directly, it doesn't very Izaya-esque. It's too bold of a move, even for him, and especially against you, Mister Shiki. This may just be a misunderstanding."

"My thoughts exactly. In any other case, I would have given him the benefit of the doubt, but messages have been popping up on the Dollars website saying things like 'Orihara steals a big secret from the yakuza', I cannot overlook something like that."

"Dollars?" Shinra picked up his phone from the coffee table. There were several unread messages from Dollars. He read the first few, they confirmed Shiki's claims. He didn't notice the incoming messages, he was too busy thinking of Celty and that whole situation with his father.

Wait.

"Mister Shiki, did that van happen to come from Nebula?"

It was a long shot. But his father had asked him earlier if anyone had come to visit. Shiki happened to arrive a few minutes after he called. Even if Shiki was asking about Izaya, what were those chances that the two incidents were connected?

Shiki eyes snapped up to meet his and he nodded.
"You know something Kishitani-sensei" A statement, not a question.

The young doctor pursed his lips. "I'm not entirely sure, but I may be able to get some answers for you after I make a phone call."

"Izaya did this?" Togusa said as he nudged one of the thugs on the ground. There were ten others littering the ground. "I didn't think this was his style"

"It's not" Kadota frowned. They rushed to the convenient store as soon as they read the post describing Izaya's miraculous victory against a group of thugs here.

Togusa turned back to him "So what do we do now, Kadota?

"We either keep looking, or wait for another lead on where he might be" Kadota said.

Walker sat up straighter in his seat "Hey! I got a reply! It's the admin! The admin contacted us again!"

Kadota turned to him, "What does it say?"

"It says I'll send you his location shortly, in return, please help him out'. Woah! The admin is kind of cool, huh? I'm starting to think he's the Tsuna type of leader isn't he? At first you think he is a no good leader who does nothing, but then he goes all 'Boss-man' in a tight spot!"

"Uwah! That's so true! Does that make us his 'family'? Awesome!" Erika asked.

Kadota tuned out the rest of their conversation.

The last time the admin answered to them was when they picked up a girl with a scar around her neck. Afterwards, the admin organized the first ever Dollars meeting. Kadota wondered if a similar situation would happen this time around. He doubted it, the situation was too out of control. The Dollars was currently divided by people like them who looked to help Izaya, people going after Izaya for money other personal reasons, people who didn't want to get involved, and people who were sceptical of the whole situation. If, for some reason, the leader needed to round up the Dollars again this time, he would have trouble coordinating everyone.

Until the whole situation clears up that is. For that to happen, they needed prove Izaya's innocence, and to do that, they needed to catch up with Izaya first.

Kadota wasn't particularly close with the notorious informant. They were friends from high school and they occasionally hung out and talked. But, they respected each other's personal lifestyles and did not get involved with each other's affairs (though Kadota suspected that Izaya would poke his nose in his affairs behind his back regardless).

But this time, it was different. Izaya was being actively pursued by the Dollars (or at least a large portion of them). After seeing the amount of people in the online gang with his own eyes, he didn't wish that fate on anyone. Izaya was in over his head, and Kadota was in a position to help him out.

"The admin again!" Walker announced, "He said Izaya is at 60-kai street, being chased by another group of thugs!"

Kadota nodded, "Right, let's go then"
Hachimenroppi does not admit he is wrong often. He would cling to his ideas like a stubborn child. But being exhausted, injured and chased for the second time within the hour, he was willing to admit that maybe he should have listened to Shingen and stayed in the lab.

He didn't know how long he could run from this group, he was still tired and hurt from the last round of thugs. And this group seemed to be twice the size of the previous. He wouldn't be able to defend himself as well this time around.

He grit his teeth and pushed himself to run faster. He just needed somehow loose this group, and hide until he could figure something out. He had enough of these humans.

Leading the group into another alley in hopes of losing them in the maze of turns was the only plan of action he could come up with in his haste. His plan backfired on him when he hit a dead end in an open lot, the exit of which he just ran in through. His pursuers ran in after him, and Roppi found himself trapped for the second time that day.

He scanned the lot desperately for any chance to escape, when he spotted a chain link fence at the far end of the lot. He broke off into a mad dash towards it and began to scale it as quick as he could. He wasn't fast enough, it seems. A strong grip wrapped his ankle and pulled him down, with the help of a few others. Roppi fell back and unceremoniously landed in a heap on the group.

He felt himself getting lifted by the scruff of his shirt and thrown into the metal fence that rattled in protest. Roppi gripped at the fence weakly and used it to steady himself. He felt disgusted for showing his weakness in front of these humans, but his body was at its limit. He didn't think he had the energy to run anymore.

He turned and glared defiantly at the delinquents behind him, and noticed for the first time that they were all carrying various weapons. He definitely didn't have the energy to deal with all of them.

"Don't try any funny business now, we heard about your scuffle with those other guys earlier. But unlike them, we came prepared. And I'd like to see you try to crush these with your bare hands" the brunette in the front said, tapping his metal bat against the concrete.

Roppi narrowed his eyes "How did you find out about that?" Those other thugs should still be out cold, and he was sure there were no witnesses passing by. Did the leader contact more men to take him down? If so, he'd expect that bastard to at least show up to get revenge. Even if he would be hiding behind the larger group like the coward he was.

"The Dollars has eyes everywhere. You mess with one of us, the rest of us know. And we don't appreciate people messing with us very much" said Random Henchmen number two.

"Dollars?" Roppi recalled the mysterious online gang Kanra told him about all those months ago "What do the Dollars want with me?"

"I think you know that, Mr. Information Broker" sneered another nameless lackey.

They knew what he was then? How did they find out? They're still referring to him as if he was Izaya, but was it possible that they knew he wasn't human? Of course, a normal human couldn't have broken a rod with his bare hands. That must have tipped them off. So they're after Shingen's research? It cleared up a few things. The last group said something about money for turning him in. They might be planning to sell him to another scientific organization for profit.

Irrational fear gripped his chest. Shingen was no saint, but at least he got a freedom of choice and speech. If he fell in the hands of anyone else, that luxury was not guaranteed. If they managed to
He lunged at the nearest man, catching him off guard and clocked his across the jaw. He grabbed the man’s weapon and swung it at another thug. Something slammed against the side of his head and left his ear ringing.

He was careless, unlike the other group, these guys were quick to take advantage of his openings. More impacts followed after, hitting his shoulder, his stomach, his nose, his stomach again, his cheek, his knees, anywhere they could reach.

He fell back and hit the metal fence, which shuttered under the impact. He slid down uselessly like a puppet whose strings were cut. He face stung painfully, his lips were starting to swell and his vision was swimming slightly. He was vaguely aware that the men were closing around him. Roppi closed his eyes and accepted that this fight had been lost. He briefly wondered what would happen to him and if Shingen would be disappointed.

He waited for an impact to land, but it never came. He slowly opened his eyes to see that the thugs stood frozen, staring at something behind him, beyond the fence. That's when he heard an ominous voice from somewhere above his head.

"Found you, I-za-ya-kuuuun"

Roppi felt an inexplicable chill at those words. He tilted his head upwards and tried to focus his blurry eyes. He saw two large hands gripping at the fence. The hands suddenly pulled at the fence, the metal bending under their grip obediently.

Was he really seeing that?

Roppi, in his slightly delirious state, watched in fascination as the hands yanked the crushed fence straight from the ground. Without any support on his back, he fell backwards, to the feet of the owner of those amazingly strong hands.
The newcomer wasn't particularly built, and he was slightly taller than average. What really made him look out of place was the expensive-looking bartender suit he wore. His blond hair shone against the blue sky, swaying slightly in the breeze. He wore blue-tinted sunglasses that sat low on the bridge of his nose, allowing his eyes to peek out from above them.

His honey coloured eyes bore into his own, quietly raging. Like liquid fire.

Roppi shivered despite himself. Those eyes held his gaze for a while longer before returning his attention to the cowering thugs.

He lowered the fence in his hands crumpled into a ball it as if it were paper. He sent the large ball of metal hurling at them, sending some of them flying and bowling others over. The luckier (and smarter) ones managed to scramble to their feet and run as fast as they could out of the lot. A few foolish ones stood to fight over their prey. They picked up their weapons and approached the new challenger.

The blond man looked unconcerned. He stepped over Roppi and spoke, "I'm only going to tell you once. Beat it, or I'll kill you"

The men faltered. One man gulped before seemingly gathering his courage. And he ran at him, bat lifted above his head. The blond man side stepped the thug and grabbed the back of his hoodie, lifting him swinging him around like a rag doll before releasing him, sending flying into a brick wall across the lot.
The others were stunned as they watched him as he crashed to the ground, they didn't even notice that the blond man was already behind them. They were all sent flying before they even realized what had happened.

In a blink of an eye, it was over.

He completely demolished that gang. It was twice the size of the previous group Roppi fought and he beat them in a fraction of the time, with minimal effort.

His saviour returned his attention back to Roppi on the floor. Roppi tried not to look as dumbfounded as he felt. He realized that he probably should say something.

"I-I...um, thank you..."

The man scoffed, "Don't get the wrong idea. I'm doing the polite thing and getting these runts off your back so you can return the favour by politely getting the fuck out of Ikebukuro"

Roppi frowned, 'What was this guy's problem?'

He pushed himself to his feet and dusted himself off. The pain was wearing off, but still there. He was able to stand at least.

"I'd be more than happy to. The people in this city have caused nothing but problems since I got here."

**WHAM**

Roppi flew back and slammed into the brick wall behind him.

Amongst all the blows he received today, that punch was by far the most painful. He was convinced that it cracked his ribs, a feat that should be impossible for even a vehicle, let alone a fist. Shingen had made sure of it.

Just what the hell is this guy?

The man in question loomed over him, fist still extended. He looked livid, his face contorted in barely contained fury. Like a vicious animal that was only held back by a weak chain, ready to break free and maul his prey.

This man was strong, unbelievably so. No argument there. The gang earlier seemed to have recognized him as well. He must have an infamous reputation in this town. How could he not? With punches that sent people flying, people must know his name.

Roppi creased his brow in thought. Why did that sound familiar?

"I saw him punch a guy at least 30 feet off the ground"

"The blond haired beast in a bartender suit."

"He's known as the strongest guy in Ikebukuro."

"Horrible temper, insane strength, and absolutely no brain!"

"He's the last person you'd want to pick a fight with."

Roppi's eyes widened in shock. The realization struck him harder than the man's fist.
'N-No...no way.'

"Shouldn't that be my line, flea? Aren't you the one causing trouble everywhere you go, huh? I-za-ya-kun?"

'Heiwajima Shizuo...'

This was the fortissimo of Ikebukuro, the strongest man in the city, the one person you should never pick a fight with.

And Roppi just pissed him off.

Terrific.

He also remembered a little too late that his chat buddy, Tanaka Taro, implied that Heiwajima Shizuo often got into fights with Orihara Izaya. What position did that leave Roppi in? Not a good one.

Before he could protest that he wasn't Orihara Izaya, a black shadow shot out from the far end of the alley the blond-haired bartender emerged from earlier. It made a thin barrier between the two of them. Though he looked like he could tear through the barrier without any trouble, Heiwajima Shizuo stopped his approach. Roppi stared at the shadow in bewilderment, for shadows to form into matter and lift off the ground was implausible, not to mention impossible. His eyes dropped down and traced the black coils back to its source. A dark figure stood a few feet away from them. It wore a black suit, as dark as the shadows that swam at its feet. It's head was concealed by a yellow biker's helmet.

This time, Roppi identified the newcomer immediately.

*The Black Rider.*

Two of Ikebukuro's urban legends stood before him. He never thought that he would get the chance to see them for himself. Yet here they were.

If he did end up dying today, by the hand of Heiwajima Shizuo or another gang, at least he'd be satisfied that he met other 'monsters' like himself.
Roppi encounters two Ikebukuro legends, while Shingen has a few unsavory characters to answer to himself.

Namie had finally given up on wheedling more information out of Shingen, and hung up on him.

It was only a matter of time, he was being extra irritating today.

Of course he played along with her little game and make her think that she had extracted a substantial amount of intel from their conversation, when in fact he simply just scratched the surface of Roppi's potential. He'd much rather she didn't have any idea of what he was capable of, but he had to make a small sacrifice to keep Namie and Izaya sated for the time being. It was always better to indulge a few inconsequential details now, while he was aware that they were digging for information, than for them to go digging in more sneaky ways and acquire more important details about Roppi and his project. This way, the two of them would not bother him for the time being.

Until they realized he didn't tell them jack squat, and they'd come back to him again.

But hopefully, he'd have Roppi back by then.

He didn't feel like staying at Nebula any longer than he needed to, he usually only stayed for an hour when he visited Roppi, now that he wasn't here, there wasn't any point for him to stick around. He wasn't in the mood to work either, so he planned to wait at home for any information on Roppi's whereabouts.

Shingen congratulated himself for remaining somewhat calm through this whole dilemma. Inside he was sick with worry. Even though Roppi was trained to handle even the stickiest situations, he still worried for his safety. The real world was unpredictable and strange. No matter how prepared someone is, the unexpected always catches everyone off guard. And Ikebukuro was one of the most strangest, unpredictable cities he knew. All the more reason for Shingen to fear for the boy's safety.

But he managed to converse with Namie and Izaya over the phone as nonchalantly as ever, regardless of his inner turmoil.

He hailed a cab and told the driver the address of his son's apartment. The cab driver road in silence the rest of the way, the way he looked into the rear-view mirror occasionally showed that he was probably curious by his strangely dressed passenger. The gas mask did get several stares, but he was used to it. The cab driver seemed to have sensed that his passenger was not in a talkative mood, so he kept his questions to himself for the duration of the ride.

The old doctor stretched his legs and looked out his window. There were lots of people out and about today. It was a little after the work time rush, but today it seems more people decided to stay out. Maybe there was some sort of special event going on.

It was hard to believe that Roppi was actually out here somewhere as well. The idea of that boy walking around in the open made his stomach clench uneasily. He wondered what the boy was
doing. He had no money, no place to go, and no one there to help him. Shingen raked a hand through his slick locks of hair. If only he had waited a little longer, he honestly would have let the boy out with his supervision. Eventually...

The boy was simply not ready yet. He was childish. He was callous. He just wasn't human enough to mingle as of yet.

'What makes a human?'

What indeed. He had an image in his mind what a human should be, and he planned to make Roppi into a living example. And the end result had nothing to do with physical appearances or capabilities.

A human, is capable of thinking, using their own logic. Yet cannot explain some actions with that same logic.

Humans can understand each other, sometimes without words. Yet it is common for them to misunderstand each other as well.

And that emotional and irrational characteristic is what Roppi lacked.

The cab slowed to a stop in front of the apartment building. Shingen paid the driver and got out of the cab.

A perfect human should be capable of the most basic human characteristics. But that wasn't all Shingen expected from Roppi. To be perfect he had to have the best qualities man was capable of.

A person who is able to understand that everyone was equal. A person who is able to look past another person's faults and respect them for who they are. A person who had been wronged, but forgives because he learns from the experience, and knows nothing would come from dwelling in the past.

Those were all quality of a virtuous person.

'When Roppi shows that he is capable of that, he would truly become a perfect human.'

All his thoughts were abandoned when he felt his phone vibrate in his pocket. He quickly answered it.

"Hello? Izaya?"

There was a pause, then "...Father? ...It's me"

Shingen sighed "Oh, Shinra. Ahh, forgive me. What's the matter?"

"I um- Were you expecting someone else?" Shinra voice sounded strained. As if he just heard something he didn't want to hear. Hesitant, tense, suspicious.

"Oh no, there was just something I asked Izaya to find...for my assignment you see. It's rather important. Can this wait? I'm in the lobby, whatever you need to ask can wait a few minutes, you can ask me when I get there. I don't want to miss that call."

Shinra seemed to mull it over for a second. "Alright, then. Come home quickly" he said and hung up.

Shingen frowned as he entered the elevator. He should have looked had the Caller ID display before answering like that. These little slip-ups were just stirring up trouble now.
Shinra has been wary of his behaviour already, he could tell. This whole morning he'd been acting out of place out of his unease. The boy probably caught on. Should he tell him about Roppi? It didn't seem like a problem. If this kept up, he'd find out eventually anyway. And he trust his own son, the boy's main concern was Celty, and anything else was a mild source of entertainment. He'd probably get a kick out of the whole thing.

But then again... he may sell off Roppi's program schematics (if he gets his hands on them) so he could buy a large luxury house for Celty and himself...maybe he should think it over more before deciding to telling him.

He arrived at the apartment and entered it as he called out, "I'm home"

He noticed the unusual presence of several shoes at the entrance.

"Welcome back" came his son's voice from the living room. Warily, he headed to where his son was and caught sight of who the visitors were.

"Shiki-san? I didn't know that we had guests." the older doctor stated in confusion, "Forgive me for interup-" Shingen froze when he caught sight of the television. There, on the screen was what looked like video surveillance footage that was paused on a shot of a boy who was none other than Roppi. He knew it was him for sure, the jacket amongst other things gave him away.

"Actually we were waiting for you, father. There is a...situation that has occurred that I believe you may have some answers to. This is a Nebula related situation after all, and as a well-informed, high-priority employee, you'd have more information on this than I do."

Oh dear god. Think. Think. Think.

"Is that so? Do tell me what happened, and I'll see what I can tell you."

'They've discovered Roppi. Or do they have the wrong idea? Do they know? What do I say? Damn it Shinra, warn your father when there is yakusa visiting for goodness' sake!'

So many thoughts rushed through his head as he silently panicked. Shingen fought hard to keep his voice calm and serious rather than horrified as he felt. Never had he been so glad to have his mask to conceal his face.

He had known about the cargo shipment today. He had been present when Shiki had come to see the weapon at Nebula Corporation. He was there briefly, but Shiki remembered him. With that reassurance, he told him what happened with the barest details knowing that Shingen didn't need any further explanation regarding the cargo itself.

The yakuza executive recounted the events calmly and showed him the security footage. Shingen was only half listening. Shingen was more focused on how he would cover for whatever Roppi had done without sounding too suspicious. Shiki was an excellent judge of character, and was very attentive. It would be next to impossible to lie to him, even with a mask to cover his face. But he'd still give it a shot.

"What I am really worried about is why he was in there. If you happen to know, then I ask you to enlighten me so that I can figure out how to deal with this situation. I feel that it has caused enough trouble for us all already." Shiki concluded.

Darn that boy for putting him through this. He was pretty sure that Roppi could have gotten away more discretely. This was probably some sort of revenge brought on from the last few months of intense training. Shingen was expecting some type of retaliation from him, but not something quite as
"As a matter of fact, I do know why he was in there."

Shinra visibly tensed and Shiki raised his eyebrows expectedly as a silent cue to continue.

Shingen swallowed, "I had Izaya come to the labs this morning for some sensitive information exchange. We met in the vehicle transport area, where we wouldn't be overheard or monitored. Security is less tight in the transport area you see, and he would have been spotted and recognized immediately if he walked in through the front door right? Ha haa..." he laughed a little, and cleared his throat when he received glares all around. "Anyway, we were interrupted and Izaya hid himself in a nearby truck. Unfortunately, it started up and left with him still inside."

The group was silent as they processed the new information. Shiki's eyes remained trained on him. "You're lying"

Shingen sighed and met his gaze unflinchingly. "Yes, I was"

Shinra spluttered at his bluntness, but he paid him no heed. The guards in the room all took a noticeable step closer to the man in question. A silent threat.

He continued to speak, before the situation took a turn for the worst. "I lied for the sake of the sensitive information that involves what happened this morning, and I cannot divulge to you or your men. But I can assure you, that it has nothing to do with Awakusu-kai or the contents of that truck. The boy had no idea what was in that vehicle or where it was headed. There was no possible way for him to know that beforehand either."

Shiki was quiet and studied the man before him. "So, you are saying that it was a complete coincidence that he entered that truck."

"Yes"

Shiki looked between the two doctors carefully, gauging their body language for any signs of deceit. Finding none, he returned his gaze to the older doctor. "You are completely sure?"

"Yes Shiki-san, and I can guarantee on Izaya's behalf that he did nothing to the cargo"

The yakuza executive nodded and rose from his seat "Alright. I thank you for the information and your time. I will take it into consideration." he turned towards the door, his lackeys followed suit "If any of you two manage to get a hold of Izaya, tell him that I want to have a word with him. You know, for the sake of reassurance."

Shinra rose and saw the group to the door. They made a few more quiet exchanges before the older Kishitani heard the door close. The young doctor returned to the living room shortly after.

Both father and son were silent for a long moment. Both staring at each other uneasily.

Then Shinra spoke, "What was so important that you had to lie to a yakuza executive member's face for?"

Shingen slumped down onto the couch weary and tired from everything that happened that morning. He was physically and emotionally drained. "Maybe I'll tell you one day son. And maybe you can warn me next time, before I walk into the lion's den, hmm?"
She half expected Izaya to be beaten to a pulp by the time she caught up to Shizuo. But as it was, he was still conscious when she arrived. Which was good, she supposed, since she wanted answers as well.

She separated the two with her shadows before another one of their infamous fights broke out and calmly approached them.

Izaya was staring at her in mute surprise. She felt unnerved by his stare, maybe it was because there was a glint of awe in his eye that seemed out of place. Regardless, she was here to question him, she'd re-examine his strange behaviour later.

[Is it true, the messages from Dollars?]

He blinked out of his daze as a PDA was suddenly thrust into his face. He read the text and frowned, "I'm not sure what you're talking about"

[Don't play dumb, you of all people would be the first to know.]

He shook his head, "I honestly don't know what you're talking about."

Shizuo growled and took a menacing step forward. "Why don't I just beat the shit out of you until you remember then?"

A flash of irritation crossed the raven's face briefly, but he remained silent and swallowed nervously. Celty tilted her helmet. He was definitely acting strange today. Did he really not know what was going on?

Perhaps he lost his precious cell phone, his main source of information. And now the so called 'all knowing Orihara Izaya' was running around absolutely clueless. She would have found that idea very amusing, but set it aside for now. Shizuo looked like he was going to follow through on his promise. She quickly pulled up the Dollars message on her phone for Izaya.

He read the message over quietly and a look of understanding settled across his face.

[Well? Is it true?] By his expression, she already figured what his answer was.

"I didn't kill anyone...and I didn't steal anything"

"Yeah? And you expect me to believe that?" Shizuo growled as his hand shot forward and lifted him by the cuff of his jacket. Celty raised her hands in surprise, wildly gesturing to not do anything hasty.

Izaya, for his part, did not put up a fight, he didn't even pull out his flickblade. The informant stared at his long time enemy, and surprisingly without a hint of malice. "You don't have to believe me. I'm only telling the truth, because I don't know what else to do at this point."

He hung his head, a gesture of submission that she didn't know Izaya was capable of.

"I'm tired, I'm injured and there is nowhere that is safe for me. Please. Believe me Heiwajima-san."

Shizuo stared at the smaller man incredulously. Slowly, all anger on his face melted away and left only a frown.

'It seemed that he noticed something was glaringly wrong with Izaya as well' Celty thought, 'It was enough to quell his anger. Unbelievable'

"What the hell flea..." he shoved the other man and turned away.
Celty curiously studied Izaya for a moment. He was addressing Shizuo with respect. No condescending tone, no cutesy nickname, nor any insulting remarks at his intelligence. She didn't know how to deal with this new, meek, vulnerable Izaya. It seemed wrong to see him in a position where he was all but begging Shizuo for help.

Shizuo seemed to have a similar dilemma. He was muttering curses under his breath, running his fingers through his hair. He's been waiting for a chance to rid the city of Orihara Izaya, and here he was, practically giving him that chance on a silver platter.

With a final loud ‘Fucking flea’, Shizuo faced the person he hated the most once more.

"And then what? Even if I believed you for a second, you expect me to forget all the shit you've put me through before? I oughta beat you up and hand you over to the rest of Dollars myself.” he didn't sound nearly as angry anymore, he simply stated his thoughts coolly, yet probingly. As if he was daring Izaya to piss him off.

Izaya seemed to shrink at the words. He's probably given up hope at this point. "That's your choice then. If that's what you're going to do, then I don't think I have the power to stop you."

Celty nervously glanced between the two of them, unsure whether she should get a word in.

"Yeah. It is my choice" Shizuo nodded. He pulled out a box of cigarettes from his pocket, selected one and lit it. He took a deep drag and exhaled slowly.

He glanced back at Izaya and gave him a once over. "Can you walk?"

Izaya for his part looked mildly surprised at his question "Huh? Uh, yeah...I guess."

Shizuo started walking towards the other end of the alley. "Come on then. Shinra can patch you up."

Celty was just as baffled as Izaya was. Not only minutes ago Shizuo was set on ending the raven's life, and now he is planning on taking him to get medical attention?

He was deliberately turned to avoid eye contact. "Tch. You owe me for this louse"

The smaller man fell into step behind him. He smiled a small secretive smile. "Sure. I'll repay you Heiwajima-san."

Celty glanced between the two 'mortal enemies'. She was still trying to process what had happened. She jogged to close the distance between the two men, particularly Izaya. She tapped his shoulder.

[Are you feeling alright?]

Izaya blinked and nodded "Yeah, I'm fine, just a little sore"

[Is that so...you're acting strange either way]

"Oh, really?” he said quietly, pressing a hand to his left side wincing a little ”I didn't realize."

Celty lowered her PDA. Was Izaya acting this way because he's scared?

Izaya was an asshole. He toyed with people like they were pawns. A human life had no value in his eyes.

But she couldn't help feeling bad for him in this situation. He was probably getting jumped at every turn now that the Dollars was after him. He didn't have many allies that would bail him out in
situations like these. There was really no one he could turn to. He even honestly thought Shizuo was going to kill him back there, and he didn't even fight it.

She felt slightly nauseated for typing this, and he'd probably revert back to his old obnoxious self afterwards, but she still wrote it.

[Don't worry, you're amongst friends now. We have your back.]

His eyes widened after he read her message. He nodded and looked away. Without her enhanced hearing, she wouldn't have been able to hear his next words. Shizuo must having been listening carefully as well, because he turned around when Izaya muttered,

"Thank you"
We're All Connecting Parts Of A Puzzle

Chapter Summary

Tsukumoya puts things in perspective and a big battle is looming in the horizon.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Hey, have you been pranked before?

Like, any type of prank. It could be anything, from a harmless whoopee cushion or an elaborate scheme set up by all your friends just to scare the living daylights out of you.

Yes? No?

Mostly likely right? Either way, pranks are all in good fun aren't they? One way or another, someone always gets a laugh out of it. Even if it is at someone else’s expense.

Foiling another person's prank is also very fun too, you know. All that hard work and meticulous planning goes up in smoke. It's like pranking the prankster…with the failure of his own prank. Ah, the look of disappointment and annoyance on their face is just rich.

And it looks like I'm in luck! Because I might be in the position to pull that very feat. Wanna hear about it?

Today, a message on Dollars was sent out about the Awakusu-kai searching for Orihara Izaya for a sweet price.

The only weird part is the message was sent by one of Orihara Izaya's online handle. Isn't that weird?

So I paid close attention to the events that unfolded following that message.

Orihara Izaya was found shortly after, immediately chased and pursued by a bunch of gangs from Dollars. He managed to fight a group of twenty in a brawl, and showed a shocking amount of physical power too.

Huh? Wait...did that sound off to you too? It does, doesn't it? I agree. Since when has that guy had the balls to fight twenty thugs head on?

Just kidding! But seriously, it's not like Izaya to bring himself down to the levels of others and engage in a battle of fists don't you think? It's an unsightly display of brutish human emotion in physical brawls, according to him. It's also too similar to the way Heiwajima Shizuo fights, and everyone knows how he feels about him.

Ah, and that's the most curious thing. Heiwajima Shizuo is currently helping him. I know right? WHAT A TWIST! He's even taking him to get him patched up!

This is just so strange. It's as if Orihara Izaya has been replaced by a completely different person!
Huh? That would make sense… But that couldn't be possible could it? Well…actually it is possible, now that I think about it.

Like if you paid some guy to dress up like you and run around Ikebukuro. Masks, plastic surgery, anything is possible in this day and age. How much do you got to pay a guy to cut up his face and wear your own? Well there was that one girl, Harima Mika I believe, she did it for free, all for the sake of her love. Woah, I hope that's not the case here! That'd be gross.

Or perhaps this guy has been impersonating you without permission, and this whole this is a front to smoke him out without getting your own hands dirty. Also very possible, in my opinion.

I'm just spewing ideas here. Well? Am I close to figure out your prank…

Izaya?

Hey, you'll tell me right? Aren't we buds? I really want to know! Come on, I'll give you 300 yen!

Haha, whether you tell me or not is fine too, I'm just happy for the free entertainment!

Your good buddy,

Tsukumoya Shinichi

Izaya scowled at the email. Usually Tsukumoya lurked in his personal chatroom, he rarely made contact with him outside of that. But he sent him an email to get a hold of him directly. It was annoying, because Izaya was specifically avoiding him for the duration of this little affair. He enjoyed keeping that "all-knowing-omnipotent" bastard out of the loop from time to time. He was pretty close to figuring out what was going on, but also he was way off. And Izaya was pleased with that fact.

Yet, here was an email from him practically saying "Hey there! I don't buy it. I'm on to you~" that managed to spoil his mood anyway.

That annoying asshole. Izaya completely forgot that he knew his 'Nakura' online handle.

He was almost as annoying as that bigheaded brute.

Izaya bit down on his thumb hard at the thought of that other bastard who was also pissing him off at the moment.

Earlier, he received a message for Kida earlier stating that Shizuo 'saved him' from a large gang of thugs. And now Shizuo, Celty and his clone were moving together. At first Izaya was taken aback at this unexpected twist. Then another emotion, not too far from anger started bubbling up within him.

'Shizu-chan had one job. And of course he somehow found a way to mess that up too'

Shizuo never did what Izaya wanted him to do. Izaya expected that if Shizuo caught wind of his presence in Ikebukuro, he would hunt him down and kill him (or at least gravely injure him). Honestly, he couldn't care less if Shizuo was involved or not with this whole ordeal. As long as he didn't get in the way of his fun smoking out Shingen's pet project, and maybe getting him roughed around a bit before capturing him. Serves the doctor right for cloning him without permission.

But, for some inexplicable reason, that idiot decided to help the clone instead of kill it like he's been attempting to do to him for the past 9 years. They've been at each other's throats since day one, and now of all times, he chooses to set his animosity aside.
It didn't make any sense. His double somehow managed to tame the beast, a feat that Izaya tried and failed at countless times in the past.

'It's as if Orihara Izaya has been replaced…'

He felt a morsel of burning anger coil up in the pit of his stomach again as Tsukumoya's words echoed in the back of his mind. He was really starting to dislike this double of his. Just the thought of an imposter, taking his place, speaking to people in his behalf, living in his shoes without his permission, it unsettled him.

Because who would know? Who could tell the difference?

That was it, no one would. He kept his humans at arm's length, he always wore masks, and he spoke in different voices. No one had truly known Izaya. It was his ultimate weapon, and his perfect defence.

And now, it was his greatest weakness that would potentially lead to his downfall.

For all anyone knew, this clone was another one of his 'faces'.

On the Dollar's forum, not a single question was raised if the man who was being chased was really Orihara Izaya. He had them all fooled. And worse, he managed to be as unpredictable as Shizuo. If those two end up working together...what would happen to him then?

He'd most likely be hunted down by the two of them (especially after all the grief he put them through).

Izaya scoffed. 'Well then, just try it you brutes. I'll just have to cut the two of you down first.'

"Is that your final decision Shiki?" A red haired man in a black suit and coloured shades spoke into his cellphone, leaning against a wall in an empty hallway. He balanced the handle of his cane on his finger and lightly swung it in front of him.

"Yes, stop searching for Orihara. It's getting too much attention from the other factions" Shiki answered.

"Are you sure? How do we know if that informant kid took something or not?"

"I have it on good authority that he did not. But I will speak with him as soon as I get a hold of him, but right now, we are making too much noise. The last thing we need is another group hearing about that thing. I've already talked to the boss about it. He agrees"

"Alright, if that's the final decision then I ain't got a problem with it." Akabayashi replied, "I'll tell the rest of the guys."

"Please do." He ended the call with a click.

Akabayashi expertly swung his cane around in a full circle before gripping it and pushing himself off the wall. He relayed the information to the rest of the Awakusu-kai members via text before sending a word out to his own subordinates to stop looking for the informant kid and return to headquarters. He pocketed his cellphone and whistled as he walked down the rest of the hallway.

He entered the common room to see Aozaki lazing on the couch. He walked over as quietly as possible. He nonchalantly kicked the sleeping man's feet making one of them to fall from its perch on
the armrest. Aozaki snapped up from his sleeping position and looked around wildly in alarm. His eyes landed on Akabayashi and he snarled.

"The fuck man?"

"Did you get my text?"

Aozaki glared. He swung his other leg down moodily and straightened up in his seat.

"No, I didn't fucking get your text! I was sleeping moron!" He combed his fingers through his hair, messy from his nap. He was always a bit of a grouch when he woke up. Dealing with Akabayashi only soured his mood further.

"Well, now that you're awake, I'll just tell you directly. The search for Izaya was called off."

That got his attention. "What? Why? Did we find him?"

Akabayashi shook his head "We're letting him off the hook for now"

"What?! Why the hell are we letting that backstabbing rat go?"

"Boss's decision" he replied flatly.

Aozaki clenched his jaw then nodded. "…Alright then"

The 'Blue Demon' was one hundred percent loyal and had the upmost respect for their boss. His word was law to Aozaki, no ifs, ands or buts. He probably wouldn't even think twice about Orihara Izaya's situation afterwards unless the boss tells him to.

"Shouldn't you call back the men you sent out to go look for the informant kid?" Akabayashi inquired. "They'll be wasting their time out there."

"Lost my phone" he said simply, like it didn't even matter. And it really didn't to him, he was an old school kind of guy, he didn't find value in technology at all. "I lost it a while ago. It's got to be here somewhere."

Akabayashi was the polar opposite from him, he treated his phone like it was his child. The thought of anyone neglecting their cellphone like that was downright offensive. "You oughta take care of your cell, it's important you know."

"Ah shaddup, I don't need that piece of crappy plastic anyway, I'll just get another one if I need it" hegrowled, getting visibly irritated from talking to him for an extended period of time.

Akabayashi sighed. "How are you going to contact your men then?"

"Huh? Y'say something ya bastard?!"

"Nah, nothing. Forget it."

"I got a text from Aozaki-dono, he says there are new orders to get rid of Orihara Izaya."

He got funny looks from the rest of the group. "He texted you, Captain? Aozaki-dono did?"

The first man, Yoshiro Ken shrugged "Maybe Akabayashi-dono sent it for him, but this is definitely his number"
Another man nodded "Alright then, I guess… it's kill on sight now."

The men looked at each other uneasily, their particular faction tended to avoid excessive violence when dealing with civilians. Whatever secret Orihara stole, the higher-ups weren't too happy about it, if they were willing to break that rule. Izaya got away with a lot of things with their group in the past. It was common knowledge amongst the members that the superiors favoured him. He was a very useful guy, with even more useful information, whatever he did was overlooked, because he was more valuable than his actions was a threat. But this time, he must've crossed the line.

Ken clapped his hands to get everyone's attention, "Alright, alright. We do this discretely, you hear? Not in public, and we don't involve bystanders. Best case scenario, we manage to take him back to the HQ and the boss can off him there, but if we're left with no other choice, we will end him on the spot. Got it? Good. Let's move out."

They set off to carry out their new orders. One man jogged up to rejoin the group of men from a quick smoke break.

"Hey, Newbie! Hurry up, we're going!" one of them called out.

"Right, coming!" said the man as he picked up his pace, quickly concealing a cellphone into his pocket before any of the other men saw or recognized it.

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When you think of the events that happen within a day, do you wonder how much is fate? How much is planned?

I can't help but to think this when so many little coincidences line up so perfectly and make one huge incident.

Well that's life isn't it?

Everyone has a role in this world. No matter how small or insignificant it may be.

Maybe I should put it into perspective for you. Imagine how today's events would have been if certain things happened differently.

If Ryuugamine Mikaido decided to hang out with his well-endowed female friend today.

If Saburo Togusa didn't fill his van with a full tank this morning.

If Heiwajima Shizuo forgot to charge his phone, or left it on silent for the afternoon.

If Aozaki was more careful about where he left his phone.

If Kishitani Shinra had been writing in his journal like he usually does, instead of letting his thoughts wander and getting no work done.

If chat handle "Rabisan" didn't disclose a certain black-haired man's location during the initial announcement of Orihara Izaya's bounty.

What would have happened do you think?

I'd imagine that if his location wasn't posted immediately, that certain black-haired man would've gone off to look for a place to eat, perhaps a small cheap sushi restaurant with an overly welcoming Russian chef. Maybe he might have managed to put all the expenses on "his tab", seeing that he didn't have any money on himself. And then, maybe since he was out of sight and wasn't discovered
right away, there wouldn't have been quite as much of an uproar. That Russian chef may have even offered him shelter after receiving the notification from Dollars, until the commotion died down.

But that didn't happen. He was spotted, and chased. And probably weak from not eating all day.

If Kishitani Shinra had been writing instead of worrying about his father's strange behaviour, by the time Shiki arrived for information, he wouldn't have made the connection between his father's anxiousness, Nebula's truck and Izaya. Maybe if that connection wasn't made, Shiki would have left without running into Shingen himself. And he would still be looking for Izaya, maybe even begin to distrust him a little.

But that didn't happen. Shinra had been thinking about his father before Shiki arrived, which allowed him to conveniently piece together the situation. As a result, Shiki stayed to hear Shingen's side of the story, and was somewhat relieved of the little doubt that was beginning to build up in the back of his mind regarding Izaya's trustworthiness.

If Shizuo's phone was off, he wouldn't have received the messages that described where Izaya was. He would have spent the rest of his day off with his friend the Black Rider. And elsewhere, that man would have been chased and eventually caught.

But that didn't happen. Shizuo received the message, and immediately set out to search for Izaya. He found him, and for some reason, he decided to help him along with the Black Rider.

If Aozaki had been diligent about where he kept his phone, it wouldn't have been stolen by that new recruit, who seems to have an agenda of his own.

But that didn't happen. His phone was stolen, and used to trick his subordinates with a fake order. And they were heading to Izaya's location at this moment with the intent to kill.

If Kadota's group had to stop and fill gas, they would be a little too late to the upcoming 'festivities'. Izaya's group might have already encountered the yakuza group. Whether they fought or fled, it wouldn't matter to Kadota's group, they'd be too late to do anything about it anyway.

But that didn't happen. Their van is headed to Izaya's location, maybe too late to the fight, but definitely on time to lend a hand.

And the same for Ryuugamine Mikaido, if he was with a friend, he may have decided to monitor the situation through his phone.

But that didn't happen, instead, he is heading there himself. Heading to where the Black Rider, Orihara Izaya, Heiwajima Shizuo, and (secretly tailing the group) Masomi Kida were.

To think, if any of these things were altered, this story would have taken a completely different route, you see. But as it is now, everything has happened the way it happened.

The set is ready, the actors are in place, and the camera is rolling.

I'm excited for how this story unfolds from here, and I hope the climactic battle does nothing but satisfy.

And one thing is for sure, there will be blood.

I've got my popcorn all nice and heated.

Lights, camera, ACTION!
For the most part of the walk, the trio was silent. Roppi would steal glances at the other two, but mostly kept to himself. Celty walked her motorbike while checking and posting on the Dollar website with one hand.

It seems that after hearing about how 'Izaya' defeated a gang of eleven guys single-handedly, several others were dissuaded from chasing him. After discovering Heiwajima Shizuo had teamed up with him as well, the majority of the people gave up altogether. But the idea that Shizuo was helping Izaya caused another online uproar (one that wouldn't cause as much problems as the first). This one consisted of one of skepticism, disbelief, fear for the fate of the city, and a few choruses of "YES! FINALLY!"

All in all, the likelihood of any other groups engaging with them at this point was slim.

As for Shizuo, he was frowning the whole time. He was deep in thought, or maybe he was shutting himself inside his head so he could mentally distance himself from the fact that he was walking next to his sworn enemy.

"Why'd you decide to help me?"

The whole group, even the speaker himself, flinched at the sudden verbal query. Roppi snapped his mouth closed. He didn't intend to voice his question out loud. He was just asking for trouble now.

"What? You got a problem?" Shizuo growled.

"Er..no, I mean, I don't you hate- well, me?" he asked "I just don't understand why you would you go through all this trouble to help me"

"I thought I told you not to get the wrong idea" Shizuo snapped "Clean out your ears and listen carefully flea. This is a favour. After Shinra fixes you up, I fully expect you to get your scrawny ass out of Ikebukuro in return, got it? I'll take that payback by force if I have to."

Roppi still looked confused "That doesn't answer my question...why would you go through all that trouble when you could just beat me up?"

Shizuo stopped walking and pinned a hard glare at the shorter boy. The boy in question shifted uncomfortably under his gaze, but stood his ground.

Celty sighed. This would not end well. She readied herself to jump in to stop the inevitable fight at any time.

"You're freakin' annoying when you talk, did I ever mention that?" said the ever irritated debt collector.

Roppi tugged his jacket closer to himself, "I'm just trying to make sense of all of this" he muttered.

Shizuo's eyes flickered to a bruise on his cheek. "I don't beat on injured people"

"...Some people think it's smarter to kick their opponents while they are down."

"I'm not like that" he said sternly, "I keep telling you, I hate violence. If guys like you didn't piss me off all the time..." he trailed off as he continued walking.

Roppi lips quirked in amusement. It was funny to hear that the man who rips fences from the ground
and uses it to bowl over thugs, would hate violence.

People were strange, they're logic was hard to follow, and very random at times. His human psychology textbook didn't do the human mind justice.

"Either way, thank you for the help. I'd imagine it's not easy to help out a guy who pisses you off."

Shizuo glanced at him from the corner of his eye, and shrugged, "It's what a decent human would do."

"A decent human?" Roppi questioned disbelievingly. He sincerely doubted that such thing existed.

Shizuo interpreted his sarcasm a different way. "What? You think a monster like me couldn't do something like that?"

"A monster like you..." Roppi chuckled, to which Shizuo bristled angrily, "No, monster or not...I think you are probably the only decent person I've met today. And you too." Roppi called out over his shoulder, addressing Celty. Who jerked in surprise and nodded sheepishly for getting caught eavesdropping.

Shizuo's anger melted away and he was left with confusion again. It was hard to keep up with this unexpectedly polite version of the flea. He was too use to the insults, the taunts and the overall annoyance that Izaya always had going on. This friendliness was an act. It must be. He would have called him out on his bullshit, but he couldn't detect anything other than sincerity in Izaya's voice. It was unsettling. Though he had been duped countless times in the past, Shizuo wouldn't drop his guard around him so easily.

As they reached a main road, Celty scan the road for oncoming traffic, there were only a few cars driving at this hour. She folded her arms in deliberation. She nodded as she came to a conclusion before she flipped out her PDA.

[The walk is too far to our place, especially since we're traveling with one injured person. How about we take my bike the rest of the way?]

Roppi tilted his head slightly and surveyed the bike in consideration. "Will we all fit?"

Celty nodded. [Shooter can make a sidecar for himself]

"Who-?"

"Orihara Izaya" a voice called out, cutting through their conversation.

The group paused and they found themselves facing a group of twenty sharply dressed men. They looked very out of place amongst the rest of the people in the streets. Some bystanders also noticed the men's appearance and immediately fled.

"We have some business with you" the man, Ken, continued as he pulled out a gun. "If you would come with us, that would be great. We sort of have a rule to not execute in public."

Chapter End Notes

There are a few new characters introduced in this chapter, three from the novels
(Tsukumoya, Aozaki, and Akabashi) and one original character (Yoshiro Ken) that has no real significant value to the story (as far as I've planned at least).

Ken is just a name I gave the second in command of Aozaki's subordinates. I didn't want to keep calling people subordinate one and two, so I gave him a name. No significance to the story, but I'll give him a little characterization right here for the lulz. He's got black hair, wears glasses, and he's really good with guns. He's a quick thinker and takes charge whenever the group needs direction. He is 100% loyal to Aozaki and the boss.
Raising Suspicions

Chapter Summary

Shizuo, Celty and Roppi fight the Awakusu-kai.
Kida watches and gets increasingly wary about the identity of the man fighting with the two Ikebukuro legends.

Roppi stared at the gun listlessly, he made no move to follow the man's order. Shizuo and Celty stepped in front of him, shielding him from the group.

The man sighed, "We also have a rule not to not to involve unrelated civilians in our affairs. I'm going to have to ask you to move. This doesn't concern you."

"Like hell it doesn't concern us. We're standing right here aren't we?" Shizuo bit back.

Roppi was grateful that the two of them would stand up for his sake, even though they thought they were protecting someone else. They didn't know who or what he actually was. Regardless of how touching it felt, he refused to sit by idly like a damsel in distress. This was his problem to deal with too, he wouldn't burden them to take on his troubles for him. He'd fight with them.

Roppi stepped up to stand next to his newfound allies.

"Get back flea" Shizuo ordered. "You'll get in the way"

"I'm going to help you."

Shizuo looked at him as if he grew another head, "Why…would I need help from a weakling like you?" he said, looking every bit offended.

"I'm twice as strong as you think I am"

"...that's still pretty weak"

It was Roppi's turn to look a little insulted. "Just how weak do you think I am?"

Shizuo actually stopped to think. "Like, a rodent? No, I'd say a bug's level."

Roppi's eyebrow twitched. He tried not to take that personally. After all, it was Orihara Izaya that Shizuo thought he was talking to. And he was not Orihara Izaya.

"Well I'm not going to run and hide whether you like it or not. I'm helping no matter what you say" Roppi stated firmly, and he turned to address the mob "I don't know what you think I stole, but you can search me if you want. I took nothing"

Two shots rang out, startling everyone present. Roppi barely registered the sound before a black shadow sprung up from his feet to shield him. Two bullet pellets hit the floor, if it wasn't for Celty's shadows, those bullets would have been imbedded in his chest right now.

"We ain't here to talk, punk!" yelled the youngest looking man in the group, the gun he used to fire
still poised to shoot.

"Newbie! What the fuck are you doing?" snarled Ken. The few remaining pedestrians that were in the area screamed and took off in various directions, running for cover.

But there was an ominous sound of bending and creaking metal that overpowered the sounds of frenzied panic.

Shizuo yanked a nearby guardrail off the ground and he brandished his new weapon in the air.

"Oy. That was dangerous" he said in an eerily calm voice for a man of his temperament. "Shooting off your gun in the middle of a street like that. You think you're some hotshot, huh? You say you don't like involving innocent people? What would you have done if that hit someone, huh? What if you missed and hit a kid? HUH?! BASTARD!"

Ken tensed, "Ah, shit"

Shizuo swung the guard rail at the group, and they all scattered. The big chunk of metal crashed into the ground, the sheer force of the impact made the ground shutter, knocking some of the closer yakuza members off balance.

Before any of them could get up or reach for their guns to shoot the enraged blond, black tendrils snaked around their legs and arms. Their eyes widened in shock as they struggled against the ghostly black restraints. Celty advanced on them, her shadows materialized into an imposing shape of a large black scythe. She swung her weapon down, and struck the men on the ground before they could move.

Not that they could have, even without the restraints, their fear had them too paralyzed to react.

The men slumped to the ground, unconscious. Celty had struck them with the dull side of her blade, she was never a big fan of killing her opponents after all.

Besides, it would stir up big trouble for the three of them if any members of the Awakusu-kai were killed.

One member emerged from behind a nearby post and reached for his gun after witnessing her stunt. He quietly approached her from behind, clicked the safety off and aimed it right at her back. She didn't notice him until he cursed when a scalpel seemingly came flying out of nowhere and sliced the side of his cheek. Celty quickly swung her scythe and knocked him out before he could recover his focus.

She turned and nodded a silent thanks to Roppi who threw the projectile at her attacker. He returned the nod, and continued to punch the guy he had by the scruff of his shirt.

Celty paused and took in the number of out-cold men at his feet. There were quite a few of them. She never thought he had it in him, and with his injuries too.

As if her thoughts set off an imaginary signal, Roppi winced and released the unconscious man and clutched his side. He stumbled over and fell to his knees. Celty appeared to his side in an instant.

[Are you alright Izaya?]

Roppi nodded, "Yeah, I'm just tired. I'll be fine"

Celty looked around, Shizuo was keeping most of the group busy, the rest of them were taking
cover, probably waiting for an opening. She stood in front of Roppi, shielding him from their sight.

[Don't push yourself. You've helped enough. Shizuo and I can handle it from here.]

Roppi looked like he wanted to argue, but he knew she was right. He didn't have any more energy left, and his body hurt all over. He sighed and nodded. He'd stay down, for now.

Celty nodded and moved ahead to meet the yakuza members who noticed his vulnerable state and charged.

On the other side of the fight Yoshiro Ken was having hell.

Heiwajima Shizuo was way too strong for any of them to handle. It was only playing smart and tactical retreats at opportune timing that kept them in the fight for this long.

Bullets didn't work. He was actually quick on his feet and would dodge a handful of them. But, those few that managed to land a hit hardly fazed him. His arms and thigh was bleeding steadily, yet he continued to swing the sign in his hands and move with no visible discomfort. Several men were hesitant to shoot him; the bullet would catch his attention, and when you are going toe to toe with a beast, the last thing you want is for it to focus on you.

His men were getting mauled over, shots were being fired, and the whole city probably knew about this fight by now.

So much for a quiet operation.

"God damn it. The boss is going to have my head for this. If I die, I swear I'm going to haunt the shit out of that dumbass new guy." Ken grumbled as he peaked out from behind the parked car he was using for cover. He ducked back when a stop sign flew into the windshield.

Another subordinate sitting beside him winced. "It's not really his fault Captain, rookies make mistakes. I admit this was one hellava mistake, but we're all to blame. Nobody told him that we were bringing the kid back to HQ and finishing him there. I guess he got too into it, and got carried away. You know how new guys are."

"Yeah, well..." Ken paused. Something in that sentence didn't sound right. "...nobody told him...?"

"Yeah, you know. Since he's new and all, we sorta thought we should just take the heat off and let him take the backseat for his first assignment. The newbie hasn't even seen a kill yet, I don't think. Even Akabayashi-dono didn't have a kill as his first job, or did he? I don't remember..."

Ken smacked his subordinate upside his head, "Focus Tamaki, Newbie was not there when we got the order. Nobody told him about it either. Then please tell me how did he know that we're supposed to kill the informant kid?"

The subordinate dubbed Tamaki looked puzzled "L-Lucky guess?" he threw his arms up when Ken growled. "I don't know, don't hit me again!"

Ken shook his head and nudged his glasses back up his nose. "I thought something was weird with that text. Shit, I should have double checked earlier." He took out his phone and dialed Akabayashi's number.

"Hello?"
"Akabayashi-dono, it's Yoshiro Ken, Aozaki-dono's subordinate."

"Yeah, I know. Sup, Ken-chan?"

"Sir…I wanted to ask, about Orihara Izaya, did we get any new orders regarding his case?"

"Ah yeah, a while ago, boss said to leave him. We don't need him for now. Sorry I didn't text you the update, I just found out that Aozaki lost his cellphone"

Ken let out a harsh breath, "Thank you Akabayashi-dono. I'll be sure to pass on the message."


"Yes sir, we seem to have a rat problem however, I'm about to deal with it. Please excuse me" Ken apologized before he hung up.

He addressed Tamaki as he dialed Aozaki's number. "What do you know about the new guy?" He peeked over the edge of the car again and caught a glimpse of the man in question. He was one of the few who were out in the open and engaging the trio directly. He applauded the bastard's gull if nothing else.

"Huh? Oh uh, his name is Satoshi something, he's been with us for two months now. That's why he only gets grunt work, like looking for the Orihara kid. It was by chance he was with us when we got kill order."

'By chance huh?' Ken pressed the phone against his ear and listen to the dial tone as it connected his call. His eyes never left the Newbie's form. For a split second he saw what he was looking for. Satoshi had a momentary break in concentration, he's eyes darted to his right-side pants pocket, and his hand brushed over the bulging shape of the cellphone inside. It was definitely ringing.

"Mother f-" Ken angrily snapped his own cellphone closed. "We're stopping this fight. Round up whoever you can."

"Sir what-?" Tamaki looked baffled at how angry the usually calm Captain was at the moment.

"We're capturing that Satoshi bastard. I have a few questions for him."

A young blond watching the chaos just around the corner let out a low whistle,

"Man, that escalated fast" he commented as he typed in another text to report to Izaya. It was tedious and annoying to text him every little thing, but he had to do it. He had half the mind to leave out large chunks of information though. He was starting to feel a little bolder as he became more convinced that the man he was currently stalking was not his boss.

He fought differently and he moved differently. Plus, the fact that he didn't ditch the Black Rider and Shizuo during the fight and let them deal with the ruckus was a big tip off. Izaya tended to bolt whenever any situation got too messy.

Whoever was fighting out there fought like an animal. He pummeled anyone he got his hands on with no sense of restraint. As if he didn't care whether his opponent lived or died. Yet, he didn't look like an experienced fighter by any means. His movements weren't fluid, nor did they seem to have any method. It looked as if his determination to beat the crap out of everyone was what got him through the fight so far.
"Yeah, definitely not that Izaya-bastard's style"

He was already down, injured probably, judging by the way he was clutching his side. But he managed to take an impressive amount of people down already.

The Black Rider stayed by his side for a while before he was forced to intercept another pair of yakuza charging at them.

From behind, Kida heard the sound of a speeding vehicle rushing towards him.

He turned around quickly in time to see a familiar van pull up beside him with a loud screeching halt. The side door swung open with flourish.

"Safe! Made it in time!" shouted Walker.

Kadota raised his hand in greeting, "Yo, Kida, where's the party?"

Kida raised his finger to his lips shushing the group, and looked around the corner hoping the commotion didn't grab any unwanted attention.

Luckily, everyone continued to fight without giving them a second glance, either ignoring the distraction or too overwhelmed to care.

But the one person who wasn't fighting did notice the newcomers. Izaya was looking directly at them. Kida locked eyes with him for a brief moment.

Then, nothing. No silent instruction, no smirk, there wasn't even any acknowledgment that he'd seen them. He ignored the group without a word and continued to watch the fight.

His suspicions kept growing the more he watched that guy, he was more confident than not that the man wasn't Izaya. The revelation didn't quell his questions, it only brought more to the surface.

'Why does Izaya want me to follow him? What's the relationship between these two?'

While he was musing, Kadota quietly got out of the van and crouched next to him. "Fill me in" he said.

Kida returned his attention back to the here and now, he shouldn't be so distracted at a time like this. There was plenty of time to figure this whole situation out later.

"Shizuo-san's been taking care of most of them, the Black Rider is taking care of anyone who tries to get by him, and Izaya is down for the count now. But he shockingly took care of a lot of guys before you got here." He gestured to the unconscious men laying nearby the informant.

"I see. So that really was him who took on eleven guys by himself?"

"Seems like it…"

"What about your friend over there?"

"Huh?"

"Your friend, the guy with the air conditioner name, Ryuugamine, I think…” Kadota clarified as he pointed to a spot over Izaya's shoulder across the street. Mikado was crouching behind a post observing the fight. Kida didn't even notice him until Kadota pointed him out.
"Shit!" Kida pressed himself against the wall, hoping he wasn't seen. 'Why is he here?'

He wasn't ready to face him yet. Far from it.

He quickly dashed into the van, "I'm sorry, but can I hide in here for a bit?"

Erika grinned at him knowingly, cocking her head towards Mikado's hiding spot, "Trouble in paradise?"

Kida grinned back easily, "Ah yes, my good lady, my good friend, Moe-kado, has fallen for my smashing good looks, so I must hide from him, for my heart is taken by another!"

Erika snickered excitedly, "Knew it."

"What's happening now?" Togusa muttered as he watched the fight, drawing everyone's attention back outside.

A few of the yakuza were beginning to draw back and regroup. Their captain had his gun out, and was surprisingly pointing it at one of his own men. He was pointing it at the man who fired the first shot earlier.

"That's enough," he called out. "Stop fighting, now."

The rest of the yakuza paused. They exchanged surprised glances, but obediently lowered their weapons. The Black Rider also ceased fighting, and attentively watched the group.

Heiwajima Shizuo, who was engaging the man held at gunpoint, also stopped and lowered the stop sign in his hand.

"What's this now?"

The leader nudged his glasses back to the bridge of his nose with one hand as his gun trained on his subordinate with the other, "There seems to be a little misunderstanding, Heiwajima-san. We are no longer pursuing Mister Orihara, nor do we want to cause him harm. We are withdrawing from this fight, peacefully."

"H-Hey now C-Captain…why you pointin' that at me?"

"Shut it Satoshi. I figured your little scheme out. I'll deal with you later"

Satoshi face paled and he snapped his mouth shut.

"I'm not passive enough to let you bastards start a fight and walk away like it was nothing. Take some responsibility for the trouble you caused" Shizuo seethed, gripping the sign in hand tightly.

He snapped his head to the side when he felt a weight on his shoulder. Celty's hand was there stopping him from arguing further. She shook her head.

[Let's stop fighting. We need to get Izaya some help, remember?]

Shizuo's ire slowly evaporated, he acknowledged that they did have more important things to do than stir up even more trouble. Over Celty's shoulder he could see the flea on the ground, looking worse for wear.

…he could let the bastards slide for now.
"Che. Alright." Shizuo nodded, and called out to the remaining thugs. "You all have thirty seconds to get out of my sight before I change my mind."

The leader nodded. "Understood. Thank you very much Heiwajima-san."

With a simple gesture, he signalled the rest of the men to surround the troublemaking man named Satoshi.

Shizuo and Celty both nodded in return. They both turned at headed to Izaya sitting on the ground and helped him stand. He seemed very embarrassed for not being able to lift himself up. He mumbled a thanks.

At that moment nobody seemed to notice that Satoshi still had his gun out. Teeth clenched, body shaking, eyes wide, he was going to do something foolish.

Kida's eyes widened as he shoved the other men out of the way, and yanked himself free. But what made his heart truly lurch was the sight of Mikado jumping out of his hiding spot.

He yelled out a warning to the trio.

Izaya's eye met Mikado's for a brief moment and followed his gaze to Satoshi who was now pointing his gun at them.

The raven quickly shoved his two allies out of the way as two shots rang out.

Tsukumoya: BANG! BANG! Hahahahaha! Woah! Right in the chest!

Sender: Rabisan
Message: They shot him!

Sender: Gaki
Message: Shot who?

Sender: Rabisan
Message: Izaya!

Sender: Akie
Message: Are you serious?

Sender: Warden
Message: Damn Yakusa, you scary.

Sender: Sakura no Hana
Message: Where did this happen?

Kida Masaomi: [4:17 pm, near Kumanochou junction. Orihara Izaya has been shot in twice in the chest.]
The world seemed to slow down. He saw everything happening in front of him in slow-motion. But he was too late to react. Why couldn't he move? It was like the shock created a buffer between his thoughts and actions.

As soon as the flea shoved him out of the way he heard two shots fired from behind. Izaya's body jerked back from the impact of the bullets. Shizuo felt some specks of blood splatter on the side of his face.

He was vaguely aware that Izaya pushed him out of the way of the bullets. He saved him. Izaya saved him…

His movements finally caught up with his thoughts and he caught Izaya before he hit the ground. His face was contorted in pain as he cried out.

Behind him, the culprit was tackled by his allies. Shizuo was all too ready to join them, but right now…

He returned his attention to the bleeding informant in his arms and growled "Why did you do that?"

Roppi shrugged weakly, "I guess I didn't want you to get hurt."

"Are you stupid or something? Those bullets aren't enough to hurt me, you're the only one here in danger of getting hurt you, idiot!"

Roppi cracked a small smile. "Oh...right...guh.." Roppi's body lurched as he coughed up a mouthful of blood. "...I-I guess I didn't want you guys to get hurt for my sake."

Shizuo closed his eyes, "Shut up. You look pitiful, talking like that."

Celty was kneeling next to him, and wrote a quick message.

\[I'll text Shinra. Apply pressure to his wounds, to stop the bleeding. We'll take him to get some help.\]

"ou don't have to- ngh, i-it's o-okay" he gasped out. The wound was bleeding sluggishly. Shizuo ignored him and pressed his hand against it.

Roppi winced. "Ow, careful. I think I have a broken rib too."

"Shut up already, I'm trying."

Despite the pain he was in, Roppi managed to smile, "You really are a nice guy aren't you. I knew it."

Shizuo honestly didn't understand why he was trying to help him. The flea didn't even understand the concept of shutting up. Shizuo ignored him and didn't respond to his blood-loss induced ramblings. He was barely making sense, and it irritated him seeing him like this. Yes, ignoring him was the best option.

"I'm just happy, I got to meet you"

But he couldn't ignore that. Shizuo stared dumbly at him, "Wha?"

"It's nice to k-know I'm not alone."

Shizuo sighed, "Izaya, I will knock you unconscious if I have to" he said, with a lot less anger behind the words than he intended. "I know this might be hard, but be quiet. You can talk all you
Roppi solemnly nodded. His vision was blurred and fading. He felt cold and his feet were starting to feel numb.

It wasn't a foreign sensation to him.

Sounds of people shouting and footsteps rushing sounded muffled and distant.

Heiwajima's worried face and his voice calling out Izaya's name was the last image he remembered before he fell into the depth of unconsciousness.
What Doesn't Kill You

Chapter Summary

Roppi has been shot. Celty, Shizuo and Kadota's group rush him to Shinra's place.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

This is my fault

That was all Mikado could think when he heard Heiwajima Shizuo yelling at an unresponsive Orihara Izaya to wake up.

This is my responsibility.

A man was wounded, and Dollars was the weapon.

The second he saw the man with the gun struggle to get free, he knew someone was going to get hurt. The look on his face was a mixture between desperation and determination. Not a good combination for a man holding a firearm.

He called out a warning, but it didn't help much. The man fired his weapon, and got his intended target.

Mikado felt sick with dread. 'This wasn't supposed to happen'

At first, the initial announcement of the yakuza's search for Izaya set a spark off within him.

Anticipation, thrill, excitement.

The dreary day-to-day routine was broken again, and now, for the first time since the gang war, something was getting his blood boiling with adrenaline again.

From what he heard, Izaya was doing some incredible things by himself; standing up to gangs (and winning), and showing off immense strength that Mikado didn't know he had.

And even better – Two of the renowned Ikebukuro legends, the Black Rider and the Beast of Ikebukuro teamed up with him against all likelihood.

He tracked the three of them using the information on the forum, and ran to their location to see the battle firsthand. He came expecting to see something life changing.

But he wasn't expecting this.

He never wanted Izaya to get hurt.

Through the action and excitement, Mikado didn't fully realize it was that much of a dangerous situation that someone could get killed.

But he knew. He knew what he had done, what he had created, the consequences, the results, and
when it came down to it, who was truly responsible for what happened today.

He was the founder of Dollars, so essentially, this incident was under his jurisdiction. But what did that mean? There were no rules in Dollars. Even as the leader, he had no authority over any of his people. They were all out of his influence and they were free to do whatever they wanted.

He supposed this was what Dr. Frankenstein felt; he created a monster that he couldn't control. And it was a fearsome creation without a doubt. A large, anonymous group, invisible, untraceable, uncontainable. That was Dollars.

The dread he felt earlier was morphing into something else.

'This feeling…it feels…I feel…'

His cheeks were hurting for some reason. Confused, Mikado lifted his hands to feel the sides of his face, and faltered.

'Why am I smiling at a time like this?'

Shizuo felt cold fear spreading in his chest when he felt the raven go limp in his arms.

"Izaya? Izaya! Hey!" he shook the smaller man lightly; there was no reaction, only his head bobbed up and down carelessly to his movements.

"Don't you fucking faint on me bastard!"

Celty panicked as Shizuo rough handled the wounded informant, but before she could stop him, another familiar voice beat her to it.

"Shizuo!"

The blond looked up to see Kadota running towards them.

"Kadota…"

He knelt down next to them and gave Izaya a quick once over, taking in all the damage without grimacing once, "Is he…?"

Shizuo didn't answer, he returned his gaze to Roppi's pale face, unwilling to confirm it himself.

Without wasting a second, Kadota placed two fingers at the junction of the raven's jaw and neck.

"Come on Izaya…Stay with us" he muttered.

He stayed silent as he tried to find a hint of a pulse beating beneath the skin.

After a moment that seem to stretch longer than it should have, he perked up suddenly, "He's alive. We can still get him to help."

Celty physically slumped in relief. Shizuo released a breath he didn't know he was holding.

"We need to get him to Shinra's" Shizuo said as he stood up, carefully lifting Roppi as he stood.

"Right. Come on, quickly, follow me. We can take him in the van"

They swiftly made their way to the van parked a couple of feet away from them, Celty went off in
the other direction to retrieve her own bike.

Yumasaki swung open the side door as they approached.

"Place him down here" he said as he gestured to the carpeted floor of the vehicle. Kida slid over to make room as he slid his jacket off his shoulders. Shizuo gently placed him down, and Kida used his jacket to press on his wounds to stop the bleeding.

Togusa made a choked cry from the front seat as the bloodied man's clothes made contact with his pristine carpet.

Kadota shot him a look as he got into the passenger side seat. "I'll clean it up for you later."

The brunette still looked indignant, but didn't voice his discomfort.

"What's more important, Izaya's life or your van's interior?"

The driver tilted his head from side to side, as if weighing the two choices in his mind.

"Togusa…"

The brunette clicked his tongue in irritation, "Che, yeah, yeah. I know. I was only kidding. All I'm saying is he better be fucking grateful…"

Celty drove up next to the van with her motorbike, she held up her PDA for Shizuo to read.

[Shizuo, you need to come with me.]

The look he gave her clearly said 'No way in hell'. "I'm going with them. There's enough space" he argued stubbornly.

[That may be, but it's best not to cramp the car transporting an injured person. It's better to come with me.]

Shizuo fell silent. He didn't want to let the flea out of his sight. At the same time, he didn't want to cause any unnecessary discomfort.

[We'll be leading the way, don't worry. We'll be next to the van the whole time.]

Arguing was wasting time. He reluctantly agreed and mounted the bike. Celty passed him a helmet conjured by her shadows, and revved her engine. Shooter neighed loudly in response and drove off, leading the way for Kadota and the others.

In the van, Kida focused on tending to the man who resembled his boss. He didn't even mind getting his jacket dirty in the process, he didn't like it anyway. All he wanted was answers.

Plus, he needed to distract himself with the injured man in front of him, so that he didn't give into temptation and look out the window to find his childhood friend, who was still on the street somewhere.

He wanted to see him. Make sure he wasn't hurt from the commotion earlier. But he couldn't…he still wasn't ready to face him yet, or let himself be seen either.

And the van sped away from the scene, before he could change his mind and try to catch a glimpse of Mikado again.
Roppi was swimming somewhere between the state of conscious and unconsciousness. He could hear what was going on around him, but not understand exactly what they were saying.

"-ow is he..?"
"…unno…sti…"
"…eathing …"

Roppi groaned. In hopes to make the people stop talking. Unfortunately, it had the opposite effect. Now that he was more awake, they were a lot more audible.

"Look he’s waking up!"
"Yay! Iza-Iza has been revived!"

Roppi was in the wrong mood to deal with any more people right now.

"That's good. Try to keep him conscious until we get there."

"Roger that Dota-chin!"

His chest hurt. And something was pressing down on it, irritating his injured rib. He opened his eyes to see a blond kid pushing a bloodstained cloth against his wounds.

"Get…off" he rasped.

Kida arched an eyebrow upwards.

"Cool it. I'm just stopping the bleeding. Or do you want to bleed all over the carpet?"

The driver started muttering curses under his breath.

"You're hurting…more than you're…helping kid" he bit back with much difficulty.

Kida smirked back at him, with some strange spark in his eye, "Deal with it."

Roppi would have shoved him off at this point, but as it was, he was having more difficulty breathing and staying awake. He wouldn't be able to move anytime soon, let alone push someone. So he simply didn't reply and pointedly ignored the irritating boy in favour of focusing on the van's ceiling.

Knowing that there was no further argument to be expected from the injured man, he let his smirk widen slightly and dropped his voice down to a whisper so only Roppi could hear, "So, who are you?"

Roppi's eyes flicked back to meet Kida's. He assumed this kid knew Izaya somehow, which was why he was helping him.

Apparently not.

He saw no reason to tell the boy who he really was, so he might as well carry on the charade he unwillingly started.

"Orihara Izaya"
Kida scoffed quietly, "Yeah right. No seriously, who are you?"

Roppi blinked. Amongst the many people he has encountered today, this kid was the first person who could tell him apart from his look-alike. He re-evaluated his initial opinion of the boy.

"What gave me away?" he asked, genuinely curious.

"Well for one, you're a lot more grouchy" he laughed, "And second, you think Izaya would recognize his own assistant. Izaya would've said something like, Oh Kida-kun! How could you not recognize your own boss? Or something else annoying like that…"

Roppi smirked, "Everyone seem to find him annoying. Should I be worried about my safety?" He weakly gestured to the wounds on his chest.

"Maybe a little" Kida chuckled, "I'm Masomi Kida by the way, and as I said before, I work for Orihara Izaya. Or 'you' if you still insist on pretending you're him. I don't know why you're trying to impersonate that guy, but here is a heads up; 'you' know all the people in this car. Behind me is Yumasaki-san and Karisawa-san, Togusa-san is the driver, and beside him is 'your' high school friend who you call Dota-chin" he explained subtly pointing out each person, "I won't blame you if you don't remember all that right now, but just don't go addressing them like strangers, like you did to me. They'll know something is up. Or you can pretend you got amnesia or something, that'd be funny-"

"Hey now, it's rude to whisper when there are other people around!" Erika said, peering over Kida's shoulder.

"How are you feeling Izaya-san?" Walker asked also appearing over the seat in the back beside Erica.

"Ah…yeah, I'll be fine. I just…wasn't expecting to get shot today. Aren't guns banned in Japan?" Roppi grumbled.

Kida face palmed. Walker and Erica gave him a strange look.

"But those were yakuza weren't they?"

"Yeah, I thought so for sure… you didn't recognize them Izayan?"

Kida cleared his throat. "Of course guns are banned in Japan, and yes Yumasaki-san, those were yakuza. Naturally the yakuza don't follow the law, obviously they would have guns" Kida said in a deliberately slow tone, as if he was talking to a child, "But you knew that right, Izaya?"

Roppi knew he potentially gave himself away. Thinking quickly, and using what little information Kida mentioned earlier and he responded as best as he could.

"…Haha, Kida-kun! You know I'm joking" he forcefully chuckled hoping his mental impression of Izaya was accurate, it was only based off what he heard from Shingen. He also used Kida's impersonation of Izaya from earlier as a reference. It seemed to go well; the confusion left the duo's faces and was replaced by humour.

But unfortunately, Roppi's laughing didn't settle with his injuries. Wet coughs racked his body, he brought up his hand to muffle them. When he pulled it away it was speckled with blood.

"Izaya-san!"
Kadota turned to face the occupants at the back "Oy, you three, I said keep him awake, not bother him. You're getting him worked up. Stop it."

"Heh, you're a godsend, Dota-chin" Roppi wheezed. His vision was swimming again, he tried to relax and focused on keeping his breathing even.

Erika and Walker both apologized profusely and obediently stayed quiet. Kida however looked at Roppi with newfound respect.

He dropped his voice to a whisper again, "Not bad. Not bad at all. You nearly fooled me. You're a quick learner, aren't you?"

The corner of Roppi's lip quirked upwards briefly. "I get…that a lot…"

That was all he managed to say before he passed out again.

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—Izaya has been shot. We're bringing him over now.]

Not the lovey dovey text he was expecting from Celty, but almost as important.

"Father, Izaya is on his way here. He's been shot."

The older man inhaled deeply and let it out slowly. He let his face fall into his hands, and remained silent for a while.

Shinra was troubled by his behaviour. He didn't think the news would affect him this much. His father was the type of person to get excited when someone got hurt, just because he had a chance to operate on them. That was his idea of fun.

Apparently he's gotten closer to Izaya without his knowledge to the point that the news of his injury was more troubling than exciting.

As if he noticed his son's uneasiness, Shingen suddenly sprang up with exuberance only shown by the people who were half his age. He clapped his hands together "Right then! Let's prep the examination room for surgery shall we? Let's go!"

The younger doctor nodded and followed after him as he made a beeline to the examination room with his arms out and made airplane noises along the way.

Sure, he was acting like himself again, but the actions were forced. He was putting on an act, and Shinra wasn't buying it, he'd already briefly seen under his mask (no pun intended).

They both worked quickly, taking out the necessary tools and arranging them out like they always do. Both Shinra and Shingen have always set up their medical tools the same way. Ever since Shinra was young, his father had him stand in during surgeries, and he gotten use to the way his father set up his tools. He never really changed the way he set up his equipment, even when he began performing operations on his own. It was convenient for the both of them especially when they worked together like this.

"I'll go wait for them at the door" Shinra said as they finished preparations.

"I'll come with you" Shingen responded.

Downstairs, the two parties arrived at the apartment building.
Shizuo leapt off the bike before it stopped completely and dashed to the side of Togusa's van. Kida had already opened the door, "He's not doing so well. Can you carry him Shizuo-san?"

Shizuo was already on it before he asked. He scooped up the frail man and dashed into the building, Kida hot on his heels.

Celty went in ahead beforehand and managed to catch an elevator for them. The three of them boarded it without a word.

"Uwahh~! I got a couple pictures of Shizuo carrying Izaya!" Erika swooned as she skimmed through the candid photos she managed to take, "Kyaaaa! This is a dream come true!"

"Seriously Karisawa-san! This isn't the time to be thinking about that!" Walker reprimanded.

Togusa twisted around to survey the damage on his carpet. There was large amount of blood staining the fibres. He groaned. That would be a mission and a half to get out.

"Hey Kadota-san, in all honesty, do you think…he'll make it? Considering the two shots in the chest and look at all that blood he lost…"

His query was met with silence. Kadota's eye remained fixed on the entrance he saw the three disappear through. He sat there, quietly contemplating.

Erika's smile fell and Walker stopped trying to confiscate her phone. Kadota's grave silence was unsettling.

"You don't think Iza-Iza is going to be alright?" Erika asked in a small voice.

"I don't know" he began, "Shinra is a great doctor. He is Izaya's best bet right now. But…it's not looking good for him. All we can do is hope he pulls through."

Shinra gave his father a strange look. "You know, I never knew you and Izaya where so close" he commented offhandedly as they walked down the hallway.

"We're not." Shingen denied gruffly. "This whole fiasco is probably his fault. That damn sneak."

"...Is this about your 'equipment'?" Shinra asked as he opened the front door.

"Yes." Shingen sighed "I…suppose I should tell you then. You'll probably find out very soon anyway".

Before Shingen could open his mouth to elaborate, the elevator door opened, revealing Celty and one of Izaya's underlings, Kida, followed by Shizuo carrying a very pale and unconscious Izaya.

"Shit …" Shingen muttered.

"How is he?" Shinra asked as he and his father led the group inside towards the room they both prepared.

"He's shot and bleeding. How do you fucking think he is?!" Shizuo snapped.

Izaya's underling cut in smoothly, "He's been floating in and out of consciousness. He's lost a lot of blood, his pulse is going crazy, but he's still breathing. Barely." Kida explained calmly to the doctor.

Shinra nodded and pointed to the examination table. "Put him here. I need all of you to wait outside
Shizuo gently put the raven down on the table and locked gazes with Shinra. *Don't let him die.*

Shinra nodded in return, *I'll do my best.*

Shingen had already began preparing their patient as soon as he was set on the table. Shinra quickly followed suit.

Shizuo turned to leave, Kida and Celty stood waiting for him at the door. Celty closed the door behind them as they left, leaving the doctors to their work.

Shinra hooked Izaya up to the heart monitor, an IV drip and blood packets, it was enough for now; it would probably help if they got more blood after they get him to a stable condition. His father had already removed his jacket, and simply tore his shirt revealing the two wounds. He tossed the articles of clothing aside. The jacket made a muffled clang as it hit the ground and several scalpels fell out of the pocket. Shingen muttered something under his breath before returning his attention to their patient.

They began the operation. Izaya was looking very pale, and his heart rate was racing as Kida said.

*They had to hurry and stabilize him.*

________

During the ride back to headquarters, Shiki had an ominous feeling as soon as he heard his cellphone ring with Akabayashi's name on the caller display. He couldn't fathom why, he just knew something was wrong.

"There's been a shooting Shiki-san"

He sighed, "Explain"

"I don't know what happened exactly, but I got a weird call from Ken-chan, Aozaki's subordinate. You know him? I think you do. What am I saying, of course you do. Uh, anyway…” he cleared his throat, giving himself a break from his uncharacteristically nervous rambling before continuing, "I heard some shooting in the background of the call so I figured there was trouble. So I checked up on Dollars to see there was any news on what was going on."

Akabayashi sighed uncomfortably "Orihara Izaya was shot, by one of our men."

Shiki clenched his jaw, and inhaled deeply through his nose. His knuckles went white under the strain of his grip on the phone.

The rest of the occupants in the car shifted anxiously.

Straining to keep his voice even, he asked as calmly as he could muster "I thought I said we're leaving him."

"I know Shiki… I informed everyone. It was Aozaki's subordinates that were out of touch during the last order. I didn't think they would shoot him of all things, the original order was not to kill either. I'm still trying to figure out what exactly happened. I've also been trying to reach Ken-chan, but he hasn't picked up any of my calls"

"Is he responsible for this?"

"I can't say for sure…but he called to confirm the new order with me. When I told him that the
search was off, he sounded pissed. Then said something about a 'rat problem'."

"Rat problem?" Shiki asked. This was just getting more complicated by the second.

"I'm just as lost as you. But I can say with confidence that Ken-chan doesn't kill without Aozaki's direct order. Once I get a hold of him, we can figure- ah, shit, hold on a second…” He put him on hold to answer a call on the other line.

Shiki rubbed his hand across his forehead, trying to soothe the creases that were starting to form there. He couldn't help but to be concerned about Izaya, he felt partially responsible for the kid after all. It was he who first introduced him into the underground world. He saw much promise in him, so he offered him a place amongst their ranks, which he gladly accepted with a smile. Even at a young age, Orihara Izaya managed to seam himself so perfectly into the underground society and strategically made himself an indispensable tool, one that would be a waste to ever throw away, just as planned.

Thinking back now, was Shiki really the one brought him? Or was it Izaya who artfully swayed him to take him?

He wouldn't put it past the boy, he was too smart for his own good, and overconfident. It might even get him killed one day.

"Shiki," Akabayashi's voice returned, "that was Ken, they got the guy who shot Izaya, they're bringing him back now. He didn't say much, but he did say that the guy apparently used Aozaki's phone to give a false order to the rest of them."

Shiki's face darkened. "When will they arrive?"

"Ah…maybe 15 minutes?"

"Good, I'll be there. Waiting"

It was during the process of removing the first bullet when his pulse became erratic.

Shinra cursed under his breath, 'The labetothol should have helped stabilize his heart condition! Damn, this is bad.'

Suddenly, his heart gave in and completely stopped beating. The heart monitor rang out in alarm.

"We're losing him" Shinra announced as he started up the defibrillator.

"Wait, you don't…” his father started, but he ignored him.

"Clear"

Shinra pressed the two metal plates on the patient's chest. His body jerked upward, but his heart didn't start.

'Come on Izaya, don't die on me' he mentally begged.

"Clear!"

Jolt. Nothing.

"CLEAR!"
After two more attempts, it became apparent that his heart would not start up again.

The sound of the flat line was deafening to his ears.

Shinra stared at the device in mute shock. He finally closed his eyes and hung his head in defeat. The horrible sound panged against his ears and resonated through him, making wilt both inside and out.

Shingen sighed, "Shinra…"

The younger doctor held his hand up to silence his father, he didn't want to hear it.

He didn't want to hear that they were too late.

That they failed.

That he was gone.

The occupants in the living room snapped their heads up in alarm. The faint, but ominous "Beeeeeeeeeeeeeep" cut through the tense silence like a sharp knife.

Everyone knew what that sound meant.

Kida paled, his mouth slightly agape in shock, he couldn't seem to form words. He turned to the other two sitting with him, gaging their reactions too. They also seemed to be as stunned as he was. The Black Rider only returned his gaze briefly before turning back to the door.

Shizuo clenched his fists and scrunched his eyes closed, as if trying to will the sound away. It didn't work. It only seemed to get louder. Giving up, he stood without a word and went to the balcony, fishing his pockets for a cigarette.

Kida didn't know how Shizuo was feeling. He didn't know how he himself felt. He met the man a few minutes ago, and he actually liked the guy.

He gripped his phone tightly. He flicked it open and typed a last message to his boss. It angered him that Izaya had some hand in all of this. And he himself was too cowardly to rebel against him despite knowing that. He went to the hallway to type the rest of his message in solitude.

Celty stayed in her seat, waiting patiently for Shinra to emerge from the operating room. As a friend of Izaya's, this loss would affect him deeply, especially since he was the one trying to save him, and failed to do so. He would grieve, and she was here for him.

"Haha, so you figured it out Kida-kun" Izaya commented as he read the new message from Kida.

["Orihara Izaya" died on Dr. Kishitani's operating table. If that's all, I'm done for today]

"Ah" he sighed in disappointment, "I was expecting a lot more from that guy. He was modelled based on me after all..."

A minor regret that he didn't get to meet this copy of his. It would have been much more interesting if he actually got to meet his duplicate face to face; he was interested to see what kind of person he was. What kind of a human he was. Or monster, whatever he preferred.

Izaya shrugged "All's well that ends well, I guess"
And he smiled. He smiled at the thought of Shinra or Shizu-chan's (especially Shizu-chan's) reaction to his return from the dead. How would he look? Confused? Scared? Angry? Izaya made a mental note to take a picture of Shizuo's face when that happens, it was bound to be priceless. Maybe save it as his phone's wallpaper.

He also smiled at the irony; Shingen who tried hard to find his creation, only to find him…and lose him again.

But for the most part, he smiled because he was the one and only Orihara Izaya, and that fact won't be changing, not now, not ever.

Chapter End Notes

I'm going to get chewed up for this aren't I? Trust me, story is not ending. I wish I could say more, but I don't like spoiling things. But what I will say is that a couple of things that have been hinted at, or only half explained will be properly addressed next chapter.
Shingen reveals his secret, and the Awakusu find out who was behind the shootings.

Shingen clicked his tongue in annoyance and unplugged the heart monitor machine, then resumed patching up the wound he was working on.

Shinra snapped his head up. "What on earth are you doing?!"

"It's going to get annoying after a while…so I unplugged it."

Shinra stood, dumbfounded. It wasn't surprising for such an absurd sentence to come from his father. But one that was delivered in a completely serious tone implied that he was not joking.

"Father…his heart stopped. There's nothing else we can do now. He's gone." Shinra murmured, as he looked at his friend's lifeless face. It was hard to believe that Izaya was gone. The entirety of the situation didn't hit him yet. And he wasn't going to let it, he was still in the operating room, and here he was a doctor first. Emotions could come later. Here, he needed to be professional.

And right now, he father was doing the exact opposite of that.

"Seriously dad, that's enough"

Shingen shook his head, and his hands kept working. Calmly treating a dead man's wounds.

"Son, I know what I'm doing" he extracted the bullet from the wound, "Trust me, I'll explain properly later"

He was being serious. He was seriously going to continue. What made him absolutely confident that he could somehow cure the body that was slowly getting cold on the table? He wasn't going to tolerate this behaviour anymore. Hiding things from him and sneaking around, Shinra could handle. Lying to a group of yakuza, putting the both of them in danger was pushing it. And now he was disrespecting his dead friend? He had to put his foot down to this nonsense.

"Just what part of dead don't you understand?" Shinra grounded out.

Shingen sighed "He's not dead"

Shinra frowned. He re-examined the body as his father started stitching. He checked his pulse.

And anticlimactically, he found there was none.

"His heart stopped, he's not breathing…That's as dead as you can get father."

"Look, I don't have time to stop and explain, just help me and finish up with that wound"
Shinra pursed his lips and gave his father a hard stare (which was ignored). He sighed irritably but he did as he was told and continued stitching the gunshot wound he previously abandoned. He has done stranger things than mending a dead man's injuries.

"We have time now, you can explain while we work, can't you?" All this secrecy and promises to 'tell him later' wasn't going to cut it. Shinra wanted answers, and at this point, he deserved that much at least.

The older doctor paused, "...Well I suppose I can...But, this does not leave this room, understand?"

Shinra nodded.

And so, Shingen began telling his son Roppi's story.

The atmosphere in the Awakusu-kai headquarters was brutally tense. The hostility was thick in the air, like a cloud of swarming bees; buzzing, agitated that their home had been invaded by intruders. Everyone had heard what had happened.

The news had spread that there was a mole that had snuck into their ranks and hoodwinked a whole group of them to go against orders. The word 'mole' alone was more than enough to set the yakuza men off. They were absolutely infuriated when they heard what he did. Several men who were eager to see the rat's punishment gathered outside the common room; where three demons were dealing with the soon to be dead man inside.

Shiki wiped the blood off of his fists on a handkerchief, while digging his boot into the whimpering man's cheek. When he was done, he dropped the soiled cloth onto the man's face and rolled his sleeves back down, seemingly done offering his share of pain.

He passed Akabayashi, who had a mad grin on his face.

He whistled at the damage his colleague dealt to the bloody man on the ground. "Wow Shiki. Usually you're supposed to ask the questions, then beat the answers out of them."

Shiki tsked as he sat down on the couch, "Do I look like I'm in a questioning mood right now? You go."

Akabayashi gave him a lazy salute "Sure thing."

He strode over to the bloodied man on the floor.

"So, there is an easy way, and there is a fun way. Your choice. Are you going to tell us what we want to know?"

Satoshi, the man in question peered up at his interrogator with one swollen eye, "Fuck you, Red. I ain't saying shit."

The red-haired demon grinned, "I was hoping you'd say that. First things first..." he kneeled down and casually stabbed Satoshi's hand, nailing it to the floor, "You are to address me as Akabayashi-sama, got it?"

His victim only hollered in response.

The rest of the men watched the violence without batting an eye. Only wincing when Akabayashi pulled out more unconventional tools, like a carrot peeler.
The man screamed and cried for about ten minutes before finally begging for mercy. A sign that he was close to breaking.

That was when Shiki's phone vibrated in his pocket. It attracted the attention of most of the people in the room, being the only other sound apart from Satoshi's pitiful cries. He retrieved the phone and waved them off, only sparing Aozaki an apologetic glance for the disturbance. He checked to see who was calling and froze. Shiki stared in slight disbelief at the caller ID, then he swiftly pressed the answer button to take the call.

"Hello?"

"Yo~ Shiki-san! How's it going?"

Shiki sighed in annoyance and slight relief. But mostly annoyance. "You haven't been answering my calls all day."

"Well you know…I was a little preoccupied" said the smooth, always-too-cocky voice over the line.

Shiki scoffed "I figured. Yet, getting shot sure didn't stop you from calling back."

"Haha, true. Well, this way, I get some peace and quiet, instead of running from all the big scary goons, preventing me from calling you back." the caller responded playfully as if the whole idea was amusing to him.

"Good to know you're perfectly fine" Shiki commented as he rose from the couch to walk over to the corner of the room to keep the conversation private and to get away from the loud, pain-laced howls behind him.

"Worried about me? My, I'm flattered"

"Don't get ahead of yourself. It would have been troublesome to replace you, my main concern was where we'd get our intel from if you got yourself killed." 

"How cruel of you Shiki-san. Ahh, now I'm wounded in more ways than one"

"Speaking of which, shouldn't you be resting Izaya?" Shiki asked once he was sure no one was eavesdropping. "Or is there something important that you wanted to ask that couldn't wait?"

"Hit the nail on the head as usual" Izaya chuckled, "And yes, just one little thing I want to ask about. And I believe I hear him screaming in the background."

Shiki half-turned towards the commotion behind him. "The rat that shot you, huh? His name is Satoshi. That's about as much as I can tell you now…does the name ring a bell?"

"Hmm…can't say it does. Is there nothing else?"

"Not at the moment, but I think he'll be telling us a little more about himself soon."

On cue, Akabayashi hailed one of Aozaki's men who were watching from their seats around the dining table, "Yo, Ken-chan, pass me the salt."

"OKAY! OKAY! I'LL TALK! I'll talk! God…Please, j-just stop!"

The redhead kissed his teeth in displeasure. "Maaan, what a pushover. I didn't even get to the good stuff yet," he called out to Aozaki over his shoulder, "He's all yours Aozaki-san"
Aozaki, who sat on the couch through the duration of the brutality signaled his men to bring the broken man to him. Unlike Akabayashi, he wasn't the type to get his own hands dirty.

Ken was the one who dragged the broken man over to their boss, dropping him at Aozaki's feet.

"Let's make this quick you little shit. From the top, what's your name?"

"Satoshi Urameshi…"

"Why did you join the Awakusu-kai?"

"T-To gather information about the w-weapon from Nebula…"

Aozaki's face darkened. "What fucking data did you collect?"

"Only w-what it was, and the estimated damage it can cause. That's it I swear!"

The fool didn't know those two pieces of information were more than enough to get unwanted attention from the other factions. They definitely wouldn't ignore such a big threat. The destructive power that weapon held was more powerful than all the weapons possessed by any of the surrounding Japanese yakuza. To hold that power, was like holding the ultimate trump card. Nobody would oppose them. Once the existence of the weapon was out, there would definitely be bloodshed over it. It was war initiating information. Leaking that information was like painting a giant target on their organization's back.

"Did you tell anyone about it?"

"…Y-Yes"

"Who?"

"…Y-Yodogiri Jinnai, the guy who paid me to infiltrate this place."

The occupants in the room stirred in recognition to the name. The Awakusu has being pursuing him for a long time, but he'd always manage to avoid them. He's been causing a lot of trouble to their faction in the past; getting their men killed, leaking information, and causing fights between them and other groups. It would make sense that he was behind this incident too.

Aozaki was not amused. He continued to question the kneeling man, doing his best not to lose his temper, "Why did you send Ken's group the message to kill Orihara Izaya?"

"Yodogiri-san also ordered me to do that. He said something about wanting to take advantage of a convenient situation to rid himself of a long-time thorn in his side."

Aozaki closed his eyes as he mulled over the new turn of events in his head. "Alright. That's all I needed to know. I'm done with this little shit."

He signaled to his men again, a shooing gesture to the man at his feet.

"Please! Wait! Please, I didn't hurt any of your guys right? I told you what you wanted to know! Don't hurt me!" Satoshi all but sobbed.

Aozaki nodded, "That's true. But, we can't just overlook your actions either. So I'll tell you what, we'll let you go. You ain't welcome here no more. You're officially purged from the Awakusu-kai. Ken will go over the rest of the details with you."
He rose from his seat and turned to leave. Satoshi watched him go; flabbergasted, yet very relieved that his punishment wasn't worse. Regardless of how much he pleaded against it, he was sure they would do something more severe to him for his actions.

While Satoshi was still lost in his thoughts, Ken reappeared before him. He didn't pay him much attention, content to half listen to the terms of discharge, but after his now-ex-superior pressed a barrel against his forehead, he had his full attention.

A bewildered Satoshi looked up to see Ken grinning at him in a sickeningly sweet way.

"Consider this your two weeks' notice, you fucking mole."

"Wha-?!"

BAM

The rest of his cry was cut off by the bullet that buried itself between his eyes.

Shiki turned back to his phone, "Did you catch any of that, or should I repeat it?"

"No, I heard." Izaya responded, his voice was less bouncy and more serious now, "So it was him, huh? I figured it might have been."

The older man hesitated before speaking again, "Izaya…about today…"

"You want to apologize? Not necessary Shiki-san. I'm fine, so you can stop worrying yourself about it. Consider this information as my compensation, kay?"

Shiki fell silent. That type of payback was not ideal, nor was it what he had in mind. It didn't sit well with the prideful yakuza executive.

Izaya didn't really care either way, but he had some semblance of honor; he wouldn't take any compensation for an injury he didn't actually receive. So he ended the conversation before Shiki thought of an alternative.

"Well then, this was a nice talk. I'll speak with you later. Bye!"

"…Good bye Izaya. We'll talk again soon."

Shiki wouldn't admit it, but he was calmed by the fact that this goodbye wasn't the permanent kind of goodbye he was expecting to give the informant earlier today.

"Plan-B function?"

"Yes," Shingen replied, "It's a function I integrated into his brain afterwards. It's a sort of standby mode, if you will. When the brain detects that the body is in danger of death, such as reaching dangerously low levels of oxygen or blood, it will enter a state of comatose. It completely shuts down bodily functions to prevent further blood loss or bodily trauma. He stays like that until I fix the problem areas and boot it up again."

"…You make him sound like a computer." Shinra listened to his father's borderline insane story. It was bizarre to think that the body on the table was a clone that his father had created. His father explained that he had been cultivating it's organs through cell fermentation for the past eight years. What was truly remarkable was the brain that controlled it all. A synthetic brain, modeled to mimic
the functions of a normal brain, which was also able to be programmed with functions such as the Plan-B program that his father previously mentioned.

"Could you repeat again, why you cloned Izaya?"

"I do believe I said it was because I was bored" his father answered ever so cheerfully.

Shinra sighed. "I see. Does Izaya know about this?"

"Of course he knows! I told him this morning!"

"This morn-?…and how did he take it?"

"Ah…not well, I'm guessing. I hung up before he scolded me." Shingen laughed waving his hand in dismissal.

Shinra chuckled right back, "Well that's to be expected. You can't just clone someone, and expect them to be okay with it…speaking of which…you didn't make any more right?"

"Well, not really. I have another synthetic brain back in America. I used it to develop the Plan-B program. I was afraid if the brain shut off and turned back on again, there might be a loss in data. I didn't want Roppi-kun starting back from square one after every shut off. So, I used another brain to test the program, until I was satisfied that there wouldn't be any problems when I used it on Roppi-kun. And that's all I've used it for."

Shinra nodded. His eyes dropped down to re-examine the body that they had finished treating. Shingen had a strange hand held device that he claimed will send a charge to reboot Roppi's brain. Shinra was skeptical that the device would work at first, but to see it for himself, he finally believed his father's ridiculous tale. Like Shingen promised, his heart was beating again, and his chest rose and fell in time with his breathing.

Shingen went off to the medicinal fridge to check the blood supply. After a few minutes of fruitless searching, he returned when he was unable to find what he was looking for. "Shinra, are there no more packets of Type O blood?"

Shinra shook his head, "If there are none in there, then I'm out."

The older doctor put his hand on his chin, "That's not ideal. We need to supply Roppi-kun with more blood. I'd like to keep him well away from the minimal blood capacity, or else he might shut off again. I don't think my device has any more charge for another reboot…"

"I know, I realized we probably needed some more packets earlier as well. Wait here, I'll see if our guests can help us out."

Shinra disposed his rubber gloves, washed his hands before heading out.

His father called out to him before he left, "Remember Shinra, not a word about Roppi-kun" he said, gesturing to the sleeping patient on the bed.

Shinra nodded in understanding and left the room.

Outside, Celty sprang up from her seat and hurried towards him. Shinra couldn't help but to smile, if only she reacted like that every time he entered a room.

[Is everything alright? We heard the heart monitor…we thought…] she inquired.
"Not to worry. Izaya is fine. He's resting right now. His heart did stop during the procedure, but he's fine now."

Kida also approached the doctor, albeit more slowly than Celty did, but he caught the tail end of what Shinra said. "He's alright then?"

"Yes, however, we're short on blood supply. He needs some more as soon as possible. That being said, what is your blood type, Masomi-kun?"

"Me? I'm Type A"

"Hmm, no good. I need Type O blood…" Kida wasn't the right match. Celty didn't have blood to give. That left Shizuo, and if he remembered correctly, he did have Type O. Now the only challenge was how to convince him to co-operate…

"Are you sure he's Type O?" Kida asked, with a strange look on his face.

Shinra raised a brow, "Yes Kida, Izaya's has a Type O blood."

"That's not…what I mean is…" Kida scratched the back of his head uncomfortably. "I know this might be hard to believe…but that guy is not…Izaya. So he might not have the same blood type."

Shinra was surprised that Kida already knew. Celty looked equally as perplexed but for another reason.

[How do you know that's not Izaya?]

Kida shrugged, "I had a feeling it wasn't him, and so I asked. He admitted that he wasn't."

"I see, I didn't realize you knew." Shinra responded.

Celty turned on him, her body language exuding confusion, [You knew?]

"Father explained it to me in the operating room, that guy is actually wearing Izaya's face. He was paid by an outside party to change his appearance to look like Izaya with plastic surgery. Similar to what Harima Mika did. I don't know the details, but that's how it is."

Shinra winced internally for lying to his beloved Celty. 'I'm sorry Celty! I swear I'll explain it to you properly later!'

He looked over his shoulder to glare at the door his father was behind. He was surprised to find that very man peeking through the slightly opened door, giving him a thumbs-up.

Neither of the other two seemed to notice the other man's presence. Kida nodded, "I thought it would be something like that…"

Now that Kida was sure that the man was not Izaya, nor did he have any immediate connections to him, he decided it there won't be any immediate consequences for not reporting this information to his boss. He could always pretend that he left before he found out the man survived the operation. So he'd better leave soon if he wanted his alibi to remain sound.

"Well, if there is nothing else I can help with, I'll be leaving then." Kida announced before he turned to leave.

Shinra nodded, "Alright, thanks for your help. Take care Masomi-kun."
Kida gave them a lazy wave over his shoulder as he headed to the hallway.

Shinra turned to Celty, "Please tell me Shizuo didn't leave yet."

Celty shook her helmet, and pointed to the balcony where Shizuo was.

Shizuo took a drag from his cigarette. It was his sixth one today. He wasn't a heavy smoker by any means, but he noticed that on the days when he ran into the flea he uses up a lot more cigarettes he usually does.

'Fucking Izaya…'

He tried to muster up a little bit of anger towards his enemy for wasting his cigarettes and money. But he couldn't. It felt like all his anger had drained from his body. He felt incredibly tired after a long, eventful, confusing day.

Izaya was acting completely different than his usual annoying self all day to the point that he couldn't bring himself to beat him up. Shizuo had no idea was had possessed him to help him out either. All he knew at that moment when he looked at him was that he didn't deserve to get hurt.

He knew he was being contradictory. He hated that two-faced rat. He didn't need any mercy. He deserved all the pain in the world. He would give it to him with his own hands if necessary.

But when it came down to it, he couldn't do it. And his own hesitance left him confused about where he stood in terms of Izaya.

"We're enemies" he answered out loud, "It's always been that way."

Since the first day they met, the second his eyes met those taunting ruby ones, he felt loathing. He saw it reflected right back at him as he rejected the flea's invitation for a friendship. And so, they hated each other. They fought each other, like it was the most natural thing to do. Like a cat and a dog, born adversaries.

So why now? Why did it suddenly change today? Why for the first time, when he looked into Izaya's eyes, there wasn't that usual mischievous spark in his eye that always lit Shizuo's fuse?

And the things he said made no sense either.

'I'm just happy, I got to meet you.'

"The fuck is that supposed to mean?" Shizuo said.

'It's nice to k-know I'm not alone.'

"Don't say that with such a sincere face, you bastard…" he grumbled.

The flea was probably laughing at him somewhere, for successfully confusing him and leaving him doubting himself.

Out of the corner of his eye, he saw that Shinra had finally come out of the operating room. He was talking with Celty and Kida, probably explaining what happened in there, how Izaya…

Shizuo turned away. He squashed that thought along with his cigarette on the balcony railing.

After a few minutes, he heard the glass door slide open behind him. Out of his peripheral vision, he
saw Shinra emerge and joined him on the balcony.

"Hey"

Shizuo nodded in response, "Hey…"

Shinra grinned at him. "No need to be so stiff. I'm not here to deliver bad news."

Shizuo's eyes widened. "Then, he's…?"

"Perfectly fine. We nearly lost him, but he managed to pull through in the end."

Shizuo sighed. He got worked up over nothing. It was his fault for jumping to conclusions before hearing it directly from Shinra.

"But, he needs more blood to make a quicker recovery. You're a Type O blood type aren't you?"

Shizuo nodded.

Shinra clapped both of his hands in front of his face. "Please Shizuo! You're the only one here that has Type O blood, and he only needs a little bit! I don't know if I can get anymore at such short notice. So…can I have your blood?"

The blond debt collector gave his friend a blank stare. "Sure."

"Seriously?" the bespectacled man looked overjoyed, "That was fast, I was expecting to get on my knees or something. Are you sure?"

"Yeah, it's fine. But no funny business alright? You're only taking blood, none of those tests or experiments you've been trying to get me to do."

"Aw..."Shinra pouted, but raised his hands in defence when Shizuo glared at him, "I'm joking! I got it, no experiments or tests. You have my word."

Shinra took him into the room Roppi was being kept in. Shingen was there waiting for them, he prepared another bed for Shizuo to lie down on as they collected the blood.

The two doctors wasted no time setting up. Shizuo's shirt was removed, and a rubber sash was tied around his bicep. They sterilized his skin with antiseptic and inserted the needle. He was given a stress ball to squeeze as it took the blood from his body.

Shizuo hated every minute of it.

He never liked lying on a hospital bed, nor did he like doctors poking and prodding him, but he dealt with it, somehow.

He peered over at Roppi on the other bed. The raven's eyes were closed, his lashes delicately brushing against his pale skin. It was the first time Shizuo saw the flea's sleeping face. It was weird to see him look so unassuming and meek. A completely different face than the one he was used to.

Shizuo looked away 'He's still a cockroach…he owes me big for this dammit."

His eyes traveled back a second later and stayed there this time. He didn't even notice Shingen sneaking a sample of his blood from the packet behind him.
So yes, the "Plan B system" developed and tested on with the other brain (you know who that is xP) that was hinted at in Chapter 3 and 4, is Shingen's failsafe to keep Roppi from dying if he is unable to defend himself. It gives Shingen a chance to heal him even if the body itself can't make it. This doesn't make Roppi invincible by any means, it is a backup method that Shingen and Emilia created that would reduce (not eliminate) the chances of him dying. It's also how Roppi was able to survive travelling in a suitcase to Ikebukuro. Hopes that clears a few questions.
Roppi has a bit of a rude awakening, and Shingen doesn't help at all.

[So that's it. It wasn't Izaya after all...I knew something was off, but I never would have guessed it was something like this...]

Shinra and Celty sat on the couch, talking the time away. Now that Kida left, Shinra explained the whole situation to her, about who Roppi really was, and how his father was the one to make him.

"Haah..." Shinra sighed, "Leave it to Father to do something as crazy as cloning another person. He really goes overboard with his experiments."

Celty shivered unconsciously as she remembered exactly how overboard the doctor got. She had been at Shingen's mercy more than once in the past; he was relentless when there was something stirred up his curiosity. He was absolutely fascinated with her body and how it functioned without a head. He dissected her over and over again to learn more about the inner workings of her body. But the more he explored, the more questions were raised, and the more he would experiment on her as a result.

It was a vicious cycle.

She felt sick to her stomach thinking about it. She wondered if Roppi also underwent a similar treatment.

She didn't realize she was shaking until Shinra placed his steady hand over her trembling one.

"Don't worry about it Celty. Though, you're probably right. Knowing my father, Roppi probably had a tough time with him, but we can make sure that he doesn't have to go through that anymore." As always, he deduced what she was thinking easily and managed to comfort her, all in one breath.

She visibly relaxed. [Really? You'd do that?]

"Mmmh. And if you want, we can keep him here to make sure he's safe." Shinra smiled.

"Hey, now, that's rude. You make it sound like I'm the bad guy here. And didn't I tell you to keep Roppi-kun a secret, no more than ten minutes ago? You're the biggest gossip ever!" came his father's voice from behind them.

Shinra shamelessly responded, "Of course I'd tell Celty, she is an extension of myself, telling me anything is like telling her. So there's no problem with it."

"Ah, you're hopeless...but kind for inviting Roppi-kun and I to stay."

Shinra's smile dropped, and he settled for a disproving frown, "I didn't say anything letting you stay. You were only supposed to stay here for a week until you found a hotel or another place to stay. That agreement still stands."
"How mean. My own son, kicking me out of his apartment. Ungrateful brat." he sniffed, "Fine. But I am not letting Roppi-kun stay here with the oddballs anyway. I'd fear for Roppi's sanity."

[You're one to talk! King of Oddballs! Crooked doctor! Villain!]

"Hey now, that villain comment was out of line..."

[No, it's an appropriate description. Shinra told me about the things you've done to Roppi. You're the worst.]

Shingen rolled his stiff shoulders without a care, "So he even told you about Project Darwin huh? Well, it doesn't matter. A monster like you wouldn't understand where I'm coming from would you? As his creator and guardian, I want the best for him. I want him to be strong. Project Darwin was designed to make him stronger both physically and mentally, it was a necessary phase he needed to go through in order to become a perfect being."

[There are ways to go about doing that, without using such harsh methods.]

Shingen stared blankly at her screen. He seemed to brood over the words written there before he quietly responded, "We have all felt pain, it is part of the human condition. I am not doing him any favours by protecting him of that. It was something he had to feel in order to grow as a person. I don't expect you to agree with my methods, but Roppi-kun has matured because of it, and that's all I hoped for."

Shinra and Celty both stilled at his statement, the irate atmosphere dissipated between them as they considered the man anew. He didn't seem like he was defending himself for his misdeeds, only sadly stating his actions as they were.

Shingen wasn't proud of putting the boy through such grief. It pained him to see his charge suffering at his own hand. But for Roppi's sake he would assume the role of the villain if it meant furthering Roppi's developmental progress.

The scientist waved his hand as if batting away the remnants of the grave conversation before in favour of a different topic, "Anyway, I came to ask where Shizuo gone off to. I left the room for minute and when I returned he was already gone."

Shinra blinked at the sudden shift of topic, and replied, "Oh, he said he was leaving. I didn't see why we needed to keep him here longer, so I let him go."

"Ah, pity. Oh well, I got all the samples I needed from him anyhow."

Shinra's eye's widened, "Dad! You...! You snuck a sample from him?! Even after I promised Shizuo that we wouldn't?"

"Ho ho! You're the one who promised, I did no such thing, and therefore his blood is free game as far as I'm concerned" he said proudly.

Shinra curled his fingers into fists and his shoulders were shaking with barely contained fury.

[That's horrible! Shinra, scold him!]

"That's not fair Father! You'd better share at least!" he whined.

[You're angry because of that?! -_-;; ]
"No can do, I'm afraid," Shingen said, voice laced with glee, "You kick me out of the apartment, and expect me to hand over rare and valuable samples? Naïve thinking brat! And besides, wouldn't you feel guilty obtaining samples from your best friend after promising you wouldn't take any?"

As his father said, no matter how much he wanted that blood sample, he would never betray Shizuo's trust.

"…not fair.." Shinra pouted.

Celty sighed, [Honestly, you two…More importantly, how is Roppi doing?]

"He's doing well. His wounds are all patched up, and he's in a stable condition now. The rough part is over. The boy is resting for now, I'd suspect he'll probably be awake later on this afternoon, or in the evening."

[That's good, I'm glad he's alright. He's a very charming boy, I'm actually kind of fond of him]

"Celty! Noo, don't fall for him!" Shinra wailed. Celty pushed his face away in annoyance.

Shingen, however was confused, "Charming you say?"

[Yes, which is why I initially suspected there was something wrong. Normally Izaya wouldn't talk so formally to Shizuo or myself. And he smiled so sincerely. Completely different from Izaya. Meek, quiet, but respectful.]

'Smiled? Meek and respectful? Are we talking about the same person?' the doctor thought disbelievingly. Roppi hadn't shown any behavioural progress in months, regardless of everything he and Emilia tried. And in one short day he managed to develop more character traits that changed his usual grouchy, anti-social self.

"I see… that piece of information was very enlightening. Thank you Celty-kun, you've given me a lot to think about."

The couple sitting on the couch exchanged puzzled glances as they watched the older man distractedly muttering to himself as he walked out of the living room.

"Wait one second Father. Since you are Roppi-kun's guardian, I trust you'll be taking care of the surgery fee?"

The older doctor flinched, and turned on his son incredulously "Now, wait just a second! I assisted in that surgery! You can't be serious about charging me, can you? Your own father?"

Shinra smiled sincerely "Of course. It's only fair If I get some sort of compensation, since you're also walking away with samples that I've been trying to get a hold of since grade school, and I ended up with nothing. If not, I might accidentally mention this to Shizuo, he'd be really mad you know…"

Shingen slumped in defeat. He wondered when his son became so crafty. Surely he didn't get it from his father...

Sender: Warden

Message: The commotion has died down, hasn't it?

Sender: Miho
Message: Yeah…it has.
Sender: Rabisan
Message: So what happened in the end?
Sender: Asanuma
Message: The yakuza got their revenge on Izaya, didn't they?
Sender: Ari
Message: That's what I heard…
Sender: Fruits Punch Samurai
Message: That's what I saw!
Sender: Young Leaf
Message: So… he's dead or what?
Sender: Warden
Message: No clue
Sender: Fruits Punch Samurai
Message: Then no reward money? Laaame…
Sender: Miho
Message: Idiot, there wasn't any money in the first place, this was a prank from the beginning.
Sender: Haruko
Message: All that fuss over a joke? Uwah, whoever started it is going to get in some serious trouble if that guy dies~
Sender: Ari
Message: Oh no…is the police going to get involved? Are the Dollars members going to get questioned?
Sender: Gaki
Message: Nah, I wouldn't worry about it. I'm sure he wouldn't die that easily.

He opened his eyes and found himself staring at an unfamiliar ceiling. It took him a whole minute to realize he should be panicking.

Roppi, suddenly very much awake, clumsily pushed himself to a sitting position. He gasped, and tried to ignore the pinching pain from his heavily bandaged chest. It was uncomfortable, but it wasn't an unfamiliar feeling by any means.

'Two wounds…Stitches. I've been treated?"
He took a moment to remember what had happened. He remembered he escaped from the Nebula labs in the morning, and he was being chased by random groups of people. Dollars, he recalled. The Black Rider and Heiwajima Shizuo had told him that there was a bounty over Orihara Izaya's head. Afterwards…

'Ah, that's right. The fight. I was shot,' he gingerly placed a hand over his bandaged chest. Then where was he right now? His memory was fuzzy after the point he got shot. There were bits and pieces that came to him, like an interior of a van, strong hands and concerned eyes, but nothing solid to tell him where he was currently. But he figured he was in good hands, since he wasn't tied up, being dissected by unknown scientists, or interrogated by thugs.

Roppi glanced at the wall. For once there was a window that showed him the outside view. The sky was a deep shade of red, and it was considerably darker than the last time he was awake. He must have been unconscious for a while. How convenient windows were, he was able to judge how long he was out without having to get up and find a clock.

Careful not to irritate his wounds, Roppi slowly turned his body so his legs hung off the side of the bed and he took in his surroundings. The first thing he noticed was his jacket hung on a coat rack near the door. Good to know it was nearby; it also looked like it was washed since there wasn't a speck of residual blood from his wounds in sight.

'That was very thoughtful of them to clean it…' Roppi supposed as he continued to survey the room. He froze as his eyes landed on one of the many certificates hung on the wall. It wasn't the degree itself that distressed him, but the name printed in big bold letters.

KISHITANI SHINRA

A feeling of dread washed over him as he remembered where he was taken to get treated. He was being taken to Kishitani Shinra's apartment. At the time he didn't realize what that would imply, but now he was fully awake, and fully aware of what exactly that meant and why it was a bad thing. If he was at Kishitani Shinra's house, and considering the late hour, that also meant that…

As if his thoughts summoned the man himself, the door swung open, revealing an all too familiar figure clad in white, with an industrial gas mask covering his face.

"Ah! Roppi-kun! You're awake? Wonderful!"

Roppi groaned, "Fuck…"

A hand unsympathetically chopped down on his head, "Watch your language boy! Honestly, one day outside the lab and you've become a delinquent."

Roppi growled "That hurt old man."

"Not as much as it hurt coming back to an empty laboratory," Shingen sniffed, "I mean really, did you know how much trouble you've caused with your sloppy get away?"

The younger man shrugged uncaringly, to which Shingen blew up in offence.

"Don't you shrug boy! You could have gotten yourself killed! I'll have you know that you chose the worst possible escape route that caused the both of us a whole lot of trouble. That van you decided to hop on happened to be transporting important cargo to the Awakusu group. A very dangerous yakuza group! YA-KU-ZA! If I didn't clear things up, it would have gone worse, and the both of us would have been at the bottom of Tokyo Bay right now because they're ya-"
"Yakuza, yes, I get it." Roppi interjected, "It had something to do about their 'important secret' or something? I read the Dollars' message from the Black Rider"

"Ah, so you have an inking of the mess you've caused. Yes, the cargo was a weapon that was being delivered to Awakusu group. It was a delicate secret, so you can imagine their shock when you jumped out the delivery truck. Oh, that was one hell of a flying kick by the way. You lose points on subtlety there, but a full 10/10 on the execution." Shingen quipped.

"…thanks?"

"Thanks my foot! It was still stupid, stupid-Roppi! They caught the whole damn thing on camera too!" he said, shaking his head, "I nearly had a heart attack when I came back to the apartment filled with scary looking thugs, and your face on the T.V"

What Roppi would have given to see his expression at that moment. But even if that was caught on camera, it wouldn't be worth much since Shingen hardly ever took his gas mask off.

"I tried fibbing my way out of it, but that Shiki, he's too perceptive for his own good. His men were more than ready to shoot me on the spot. In the end, I managed to convince him to call off the hunt for you, you should be grateful. I even went as far to call Izaya to help to track you down. A load of good that did. Argh, I'm getting too old for this." Shingen pulled up a nearby chair and straddled it, "So…tell me how your day was. I see you took the liberty of stealing my new scalpels. Did you bring all of them back at least?"

The corner of Roppi's lips quirked upwards. He would have gladly revealed that, no, a large fraction of them were scattered in various locations all across the city, due to Roppi using them as projectiles and weapons as he fled from gangs.

But first, he wanted to confirm Shingen's earlier statement that bothered him, "You said you got the yakuza to back off right? But they were still chasing me, they were the ones who shot me."

"What?" Shingen asked perplexed.

Roppi paused, "Actually, the leader stopped the fight, and there was that other guy with the gun. I think it was an internal dispute…"

Shingen held up his hand, "From the beginning please."

Roppi retold what happened from after he left the parking garage; when he walked the streets of Ikebukuro, and the cellphones suddenly chiming, followed by the abrupt chase, his first real-life combat and his subsequent victory, his second real-life combat and his subsequent loss. He went on to tell Shingen of his first encounter with Heiwajima Shizuo. The doctor quietly observed as Roppi described meeting the fortissimo of Ikebukuro. He spoke with thinly veiled admiration and enthusiasm as described the way he swiftly fought off the delinquents and even managed to injure Roppi himself. He told Shingen about how the Black Rider intervened and showed him the Dollars message. Roppi unconsciously let his lips quirk upwards fondly at the part the two Ikebukuro legends decided to help him. He looked like a delighted fan that met his idols, but was trying to be as nonchalant as possible about it.

Shingen bit his lip to stop himself from guffawing during Roppi's recounting of the fight with the Awakusu-kai members.

The boy's eyes were practically sparkling from the fact that he got to fight side by side with the two legendary monsters.
"Well, you sound like you had fun" Shingen noted.

Apparently he wasn't able to hide all the humour from his voice, Roppi was able to hear it and immediately scowled, his cheeks flamed in embarrassment. "Shut up."

"Haha sure…now what about the internal dispute?"

Roppi nodded, "The leader suddenly called off the fight. He said there was a 'misunderstanding', and pointed his gun at one of his own men, the one that took the first shot at me. From what they were saying, I think that guy tricked the group into fighting with us somehow."

Shingen placed his hand on his chin in thought. He wondered who the man's intended target was. Izaya or Roppi? If it was Izaya, just about anyone could have sent him. If it was Roppi…well there was only one other person who knew that Roppi existed, and probably wished he didn't.

If Izaya did this to harm Roppi, he had hell to pay.

"I don't really remember much after that…that guy got free and shot me, and now I'm here."

The doctor nodded, "And now you're here" he repeated, "And the next order of business is deciding how to smuggle you back into the lab…it'll look weird if I brought another huge suitcase of 'equipment' when I already moved in last week" the older man joked.

Roppi's face was abnormally blank following his jest. Shingen actually shifted uncomfortably at his unusual reaction, "Eh?...Roppi-kun?"

As if a switch was flipped, Roppi's hand grabbed the bed sheet and tossed it at Shingen, obscuring his vision.

"?!"

Shingen heard the bed creak and a discomforted grunt as Roppi presumably pushed himself off the bed in preparation to flee.

The older doctor foresaw this kind of reaction, and prepared for it. As he stood from his seat as he wrestled his way out of the large white sheet, and kicked he chair at the general direction of the door. Sure enough, he heard a sound of a collision, a pained 'oof' followed by an ungraceful thump.

When the doctor finally pulled the edge of the sheet off himself, he strode over to his lively charge on the ground and grabbed his arm just as he attempted another lunge at the door.

"Let go!" he growled.

"Settle down! You'll upset your wounds."

"I don't care! I'm not going back with you!"

"Oh ho! Big words for someone who left the lab for a day, and got shot. Twice! What does that tell you?"

"That you're an asshole! Let GO!"

It was a childish and nonsensical comeback, but Shingen still bristled at the insult, "Would you just calm down and try and think for a second? You have no money, no identification and nowhere to go. And I'm the only person you know in the country. What exactly are you planning on doing without my help?"
He gripped his arm tighter with purpose.

He decided not to mention Shinra was willing to offer him a place to stay. The boy didn't need to know that, yet.

Roppi stopped struggling. He placed his free hand over his bandaged chest; he could feel himself stressing his wounds with his movements.

"I don't know," he muttered, "But I'll figure it out"

Shingen's smile was hidden behind his mask, "Why? Wouldn't it be easier for you to live in obscurity? Where you don't have to deal with the people out here? According to what you've told me, you don't really like them and they've caused you a lot of problems."

"I don't care about them..." Roppi mumbled. He stood there silently, trying to figure out how to plead his case. It was like that time he begged the doctor to put an end to Project Darwin. Except that time, he was shot down immediately. Not this time however, this time was going to be different. He was going to make Shingen realize that he was wrong.

"...You know, I saw the sky for the first time today. That probably sounds ridiculous to you...you probably get to see it all the time. But for me, it was the first time I saw it. It was much bigger than I'd imagined it to be. I thought I knew what to expect when I stepped outside, but turns out, I had no idea. It was amazing to physically see all the things I've only heard about or seen on a flat screen. I saw things, felt things, experienced things. And for the first time, I really felt like I was living, rather than just existing..." He paused to let his words sink in. "There are things that I just can't learn in a lab, Shingen. You realize that too, don't you?"

Roppi faced his guardian with eyes filled with defiance and determination. "I'll do what I have to, I'll be careful to keep out of trouble, I won't attract attention, I'll even make money somehow. I just don't want to go back to living like a cheap piece of equipment stashed away in your lab. There is more to my life than that, I know that now. I won't let you tell me otherwise."

Shingen felt a lump forming in his throat as he listened to his creation truly speak his mind. He swallowed thickly as he habitually revaluated Roppi's character development, 'He's showing signs of ambition, budding independence, an interest with the unknown, and typical human irrationality too. Really now Roppi-kun, who told you to grow up when I wasn't looking?'

Shingen stopped pulling, and Roppi yanked his arm away from his grasp the second he felt the older man's grip slacken.

"That's...very human of you"

Roppi glared at him in revulsion. "What?"

"I've been thinking about it for a while now... I've decided to go with that instead"

Now, Roppi blinked in confusion "...what?"

"You don't need to go back to the lab, is what I'm saying."

"I don't... wait, what? Really?" Roppi didn't know what to say.

Shingen chuckled, "Really. It's a little earlier than I planned, but mingling with the outside world has done leaps at bounds with your progress. You've begun displaying a broader range of emotion, and you've managed to develop more human-like characteristics. It's truly remarkable. And, I am a man
of science after all. I acknowledge results when I see them."

"Plus it would be a big hassle to smuggle you back into Nebula at this point. I'm sure after your little stunt with the delivery truck today, they will tighten up security. And I'll definitely be questioned; I can't have anyone investigate me while trying to hide you. It just won't end well. Also, you probably won't stay put now that you've seen the outside, am I right?"

"Well, yeah…but what about keeping me a secret? Doesn't letting me go make me a liability?"

"The only way to keep you hidden now is to hide you in plain sight. Though, I don't know what to say about there being two Izayas walking around, but we will deal with that bridge when we cross it I suppose. Either way, hiding you would raise more uncomfortable questions than letting you out in the open."

Roppi was speechless. Shingen was serious. He was actually (finally) letting him go…

"My only concern is this. You are essentially an uninvited member of society, an alien, not yet human. If anyone were to find out, there will be consequences," the doctor bluntly told him, he needed to be told this upfront, "You will be rejected if they found out the truth. Are you alright with that? Can you live alongside of humans knowing that one day they could shun you at any moment for what you are?"

Roppi scoffed, "I couldn't care less what humans think. They mean nothing to me. I'm interested in more important things." The image of a menacing blond that he was determined to learn more about was on the forefront of his mind as he spoke.

Shingen studied him for a minute. It seemed that his socially-withdrawn nature still hasn't changed. In fact, it probably worsened after today's fiasco. Hopefully that would improve as time goes by as well. "Well, now that that's settled, then I should make plans for living arrangements. We need to get you a place to stay; I believe Shinra was willing to offer you a room…"

"No…hold on," Roppi began, "before you make plans, I actually have one request…"

CHATROOM

-Tanaka Taro has joined the chat-

Tanaka Taro: Hi everyone

Setton: Evenin'

Bakyura: Yo!

Saika: Hello Tanaka Taro-kun

Tanaka Taro: What a crazy day ( ._.) =3

Setton: Yeah…

Kanra: Ah yes, today's unofficial headlines "DOLLARS' THRILLING MANHUNT!" Uwah, dangerous~ ( J > \n < ) J

[PRIVATE CHAT]

Tanaka Taro: Izaya-san, you're here! I was so worried. I saw you take those bullets in the chest, but I
couldn't find out what happened afterwards. Are you're alright?

Kanra: Oh? What's this, you were worried? I'm touched Mikado-kun. But rest assured, I'm fine. There's nothing to be worried about.

Kanra: But if you can do me a favour, I'd like to keep that information quiet a little longer.

Tanaka Taro: Alright Izaya-san. You have my word.

CHATROOM

Saika: Manhunt?

Setton: Oh nothing to worry about, just a few people got tricked into chasing around Orihara Izaya for a fake cash reward.

Bakyura: Ha ha, 'Nothing to worry about' she says! Nice (^_^)b

Kanra: Hey now! Orihara Izaya got chased yakuza and shot too you know! That's not a little issue!

Saika: That sounds serious

Tanaka Taro: It's over now. After Izaya-san got shot, I think he was taken to get help. Up to that point, people already stopped pursuing him.

Saika: I see

Bakyura: Mehh, if only Kanra was the one who was chased and shot to death, that would have been awesome.

Kanra: Ehh Σ(´Д´||) ? How does such a morbid thing make you happy? Be sad like a normal person!

Bakyura: If it's Kanra-san, I'd only cry tears of joy.

Setton: Geez, you two.

Saika: That was mean…

Bakyura: Haha, we're only kidding around.

Bakyura: Right Kanra-san? We're budDIEs aren't we? But, since there are laDIEs in the auDIEnce, I will stop making rowDIEr jokes. (Go DIE!)

Kanra: Subtle at first… but in the end you came right out and told me to go die, didn't you? ( ̄_̄; )

It was only later on that night was when Izaya made his way back to his apartment. He stayed over at his neighbour's vacant apartment a few more hours than he needed to just to be safe. There was a possibility that there were still a few people still looking for him for one reason or another. So he decided to lay low until he was absolutely certain that the heat died down.

Izaya made it to his door and found it as he left it; closed, locked and completely intact. And luckily, there weren't any sketchy figures hanging around, waiting for him either. He took out his keys and unlocked his door, walking through it with his laptop under his arm.
Shockingly, Namie was still working at her desk. She usually left as soon as her shift ended. Could it be she wanted to make sure his home was safe until he returned?

'*How sweet, maybe I should consider giving her a raise*

Namie noticed his presence as he walked over to the closet. She blinked, perplexed, before Izaya caught a flash of amusement cross her face. He acted as if he didn't notice.

"What? You're not going to scold me for being late?" he remarked, trying to rile her up.

"You're late" she replied without missing a beat. She narrowed her eyes ever so slightly. "Not that I care. What took you so long? I expected you would have come back as soon as that guy got shot."

Izaya shrugged, "I was tying up some loose ends so to speak. I needed to let a couple of my business partners know I'm still alive and well. I was also following up on certain people who tried to take advantage of today's incident. There were quite a few of them actually. It took a while to identify all of them. Recon is *suuuch* hard work. Also, I wanted to be on the safe side and wait for all the heat to boil over."

Namie blinked slowly, "I see."

Izaya shrugged off his coat and placed it on a hanger and hung it back up. "So did I get any visitors while I was gone?"

His secretary smiled briefly before sobering up.

It perturbed him to see her so…*expressive*; she wasn't one to smile for little things. And she smiled twice within the span of five minutes. Something was wrong.

"Only a few. There were a couple of Shiki's men came to see if you were in. They didn't believe me when I said you weren't here. So I let them look around the apartment. Naturally, I was monitoring as they did so. It was the usual three guys Takeda, Kusanagi and Ginoza. They left nothing, and took nothing."

That news wasn't nearly as upsetting as he expected it to be. He knew those three well, and their backgrounds. They were trustworthy to the Awakusu-kai, and very unlikely to have hidden intentions about entering his apartment. Regardless, he would do a thorough sweep through his apartment to make sure there was nothing out of place to be on the safe side.

The informant nodded, "Is that all?"

Namie seemed to mull something over in her mind, "No, I'd also like to add that you really are despicable to do something like this to someone you haven't met. Or someone who hasn't done anything at all" she said as she gestured to her laptop, presumably open to the Dollars forum message that he posted.

"Ouch, that bites," he replied in mock hurt, only too accustomed to receiving such venomous words. "I can only assume that you are referring to the untimely death of my double correct?" he responded with a smile, "I can assure you, it was a perfectly reasonable thing to do, Namie-chan."

Her eyebrow ticked at the cutesy way he addressed her, "How so?"

He hummed thoughtfully as he walked towards the bookshelf, placing his laptop down on a table as he passed it. "Have you heard of the old folklore of the doppelganger?"
"The belief that when everyone is born, there is another is an exact duplicate of themselves born elsewhere?"

Izaya laughed, "That's part of it." He dragged his finger across the spines of books on the shelf, stopping on one in particular. He pulled it out of its spot and casually flipped through it.

"Doppelgänger, the German word for ghostly double or double walker. In history there are many records of people encountering their doppelganger and they subsequently fall ill or die. It's even a reoccurring trope in fiction as well, when a character would meet their doppelganger they would eventually fight to the death over their identity. Hence, this phenomenon has always been considered an omen of death. Though this phenomenon is usually a supernatural one, in our case it seems more sci-fi doesn't it? Hahaa!"

He continued to talk, though his eyes were on the book his was holding, they moved across the page as if he was skimming through the sentences. Though, Namie doubted he was actually reading the book.

"So you set him up for death to satisfy a trope?"

Izaya's eyes lifted off the page to meet hers and he smiled, "Now, give me a little more credit, of course there's more to it than that. Let's see how I can put it into perspective for you…think about how that guy must have been living. From what Shingen told me, he hasn't left his laboratory or seen the outside world. He even told me that guy showed his displeasure of his living conditions more than once. In short, he felt trapped, hopeless, caged; which is why he ran away in the first place"

"Now think of this; he's free now, and he loves it. But his new problem is how long can he keep this 'freedom'? There are people looking to capture him again. But luckily, he finds that there is another person, me in this instance, who looks exactly like him. Isn't that convenient? He can just kill me, and take my place, and live on as Orihara Izaya. It would only be natural for him to consider something like that. He would be free from his old imprisoned life, and free to live however he wanted. No one would know the difference, right? Roppi-kun could hide right under their noses and no one would be any the wiser."

Despite describing his own death, Izaya coolly explained it in a flippant tone.

"He might not think of it immediately, but after experiencing life outside, he would grow obsessed with freedom. And sooner or later he will do whatever it takes too keep it, knowing that he might be captured one day. Days, weeks, maybe months later, he will consider it as his best and easiest chance for a normal life. To take mine, and live it as his own."

Namie closed her eyes in comprehension, "So in order to prevent that from happening, you struck him first."

Her boss nodded approvingly, happy that she caught on.

"Die beste Verteidigung ist der Angriff." Izaya supplied in a foreign dialect. "The German saying that roughly translates to 'the best defence is a good offence'. My method of dealing with the so called omen of death, die doppelgänger."

He chuckled as he returned the book back to its proper place, "Truth be told, I was rather disappointed that he was killed so easily. My goal was to strike first before he even thought about crossing me, and give him a little show of what I'm capable of to deter him from getting any foolish ideas, that's all."

"I see…has anyone ever told you that you're unbelievably paranoid?"
The informant turned away from the bookshelf at the sound of a third voice that came from the sitting area, his hand instinctively dove in his pocket and he retrieved his knife. The unannounced guest sat upright to peer at him over the headrest of his couch.

Izaya froze.

"You…"

Of all the faces he wasn't expecting to see, his own face was definitely on the top of the list.

Roppi eyed him before his gaze dropped to the knife in his hand. He lifted his own hands lazily "Relax, I come in peace."

"I find that hard to believe," Izaya retorted, eyes narrowed, "What is the meaning of this Namie? What is he doing here?"

Namie was openly smirking at the scene in front of her. She was having too much fun with this. "Well, when he came in I mistook him for you. I thought he was dead like Kida Masomi reported. So I assumed it was just you who returned home and went to take a nap on the couch. An honest mistake."

"…And how was it that he entered my apartment."

"He knocked the door, and I opened the door for him of course."

"Namie…don't you think I'd have the keys to my own apartment?"

"Oh yes…how silly of me" she didn't look embarrassed at all, only pleased with herself that she managed to aggravate him for a change.

"And while we were talking, you didn't think to mention he was here?"

"Not particularly…no"

Forget the raise. He was deducting her pay for this.

Namie rose from her seat and collected her bag, "Relax, I knew it wasn't you when he came in. I even spoke with him for a while; he doesn't seem to have any intention to hurt you either. Feel free to talk it out with him if you like." She headed for the door and put on her shoes, "I trust I can leave now? It's late, and Seiji is coming over tomorrow. I need to prepare. I'm sure you can handle yourself with an unarmed, injured man."

With that last bit said, she left the apartment, leaving the two men alone.

Silence stretched between them, thick and heavy with unease.

Roppi seemed content to sit on the couch, taking in Izaya's form. He was unsure of how to approach the situation, he came here to meet Izaya, but now he doubted if this was a good decision at all.

Izaya surveyed Roppi with apprehension, and a little bit of wonder. It was eerie how similar they looked. His face was the same rounded shape and pointed chin. He had all the sharp features that he had, the thin lips, the arched eyebrows, even the nose was exactly the same size and shape as his. He wore his hair a little longer and parted it at a different spot than he did. It was hardly noticeable, but a detail-orientated man such as Izaya picked up on that little difference immediately.

Roppi's eyes were his own, a deep and rich brown that looked like a twinkling ruby if the light hit it
just right. But they were completely different as well. Where Izaya's were sharp, yet merrily rounded, almost feline that glinted with mischief, Roppi's were hard along the edges, heavy-lidded, not quite uninterested, but seemed dull and fatigued.

'Probably my fault' Izaya thought with a hint of satisfaction, before breaking the silence, "Well... we do get to meet after all. Artificial me."

"I prefer to go by Roppi if you don't mind" he responded, only looking slightly peeved, but more tired.

"How are you already able to move? Or alive for that matter. If we weren't identical, I'd be convinced Shingen made you out of Shizu-chan."

Roppi lifted his left shoulder in a shrug, "I'm still wounded, but I can get around. I'm used to this kind of injury. Shingen made it so that I can still handle moving in this condition. A survival advantage he says."

"Hoh" Izaya hummed, "...and how exactly did he manage that?"

Roppi glanced at Izaya, "If Shingen didn't tell you my situation, then there's probably a reason. So I don't see why I should tell you. Besides, it wouldn't do me good to tell my 'doppelganger' my weaknesses, you know, in case you attempt to 'show what you're capable of' again."

Izaya smiled, but it didn't reach his eyes, "Cheeky aren't you. Just like Shingen said you'd be. In any case, I've already mentioned that I'm not interested in killing you. I'm more interested in watching you struggle to adapt with society."

"That's good to hear. Just letting you know, you're probably not capable of killing me anyway. Not by yourself at least...no offence."

If that statement bothered or irritated Izaya, he didn't show it, "So is that why you're here? To attempt to intimidate me? Or is there another reason?"

Roppi reached into his coat pocket and retrieved a folded piece of paper and offered it to his counterpart who looked at it puzzled, but accepted it nonetheless.

"Shingen said he was completely against me coming here. But, I think this is my best option, so I insisted. Besides I've always wanted to meet you" Roppi supplied as Izaya unfolded the paper and began reading.

Izaya,

I hope Roppi found it to your place safe. I'll have you know that I'm fairly certain that you had a hand in today's circus, and because of that you can expect that I will not be paying you for your services. Besides, he managed to find his own way back; therefore I don't think you deserve the credit anyways. If you're wondering why he is there now, it's a ridiculous request of his. I have no idea why he wants to stay with a guy like you, but he was very insistent on the idea. So, I'll be leaving him in your care.

"Oy oy, what's this about staying with me? Who said I'd allow something like that?"

Roppi rested his chin on the headrest of the couch, crossing his arms in front, "Just keep reading"

Izaya was willing to bet that he was hiding an amused smile behind his folded arms. Irritated, he continued to read.
I hope you realize that by allowing you to take in Roppi-kun, I am entrusting you with my secret. I expect you to protect it, like I am protecting yours. You wouldn't want me to give a certain someone a 'head's up' on some things you've been hiding from her either right? So out of mutual respect, I hope you will have no problems with housing Roppi-kun.

Shingen

"Keh…It seems that I can't refuse. How underhanded." Izaya muttered reluctantly. Shingen was threatening him to take in Roppi in turn for keeping the head a secret from Celty.

He hated it when other people had dirt on him to manipulate him. It was the second time he used that piece of information to threaten him with today. But at least, this way Izaya had Roppi to use against Shingen, while Shingen had the head to use against Izaya. They were on equal footing now. Neither of them would speak of the other's secret as long as it runs the risk of revealing their own.

"I don't understand why you want to live with me though" Izaya said, directing his words to Roppi.

"I thought it was the only logical option, since we're practically family. Having the same blood and all. Plus, I've always wanted to meet the man who gave his cells to make me. I'm still curious to know what you're like."

"Touching, but not what I meant. You hate me right? You must, after everything I put you through today."

"No, not really," Roppi said simply, "You didn't put me through anything. Even though you instigated it, it was the humans that blew the whole ordeal out of proportion with their greed. I saw the message you wrote, if that's all it took for them to come at me at full throttle, then humans are even more stupid than I originally thought."

Izaya blinked in surprise.

Then he pursed his twitching lips, "Pfft..." his cheeks puffed out in attempt to contain the laughter bubbling up within him, but he couldn't hold it in, "Hahahahahaaa! AHAHAHAAAA!"

Roppi watched his donor openly laugh as he wrapped his own arms around his waist, clutching his sides. He wasn't exactly sure what was so funny, but he assumed it was a good thing that he managed to put him in such a good mood.

"Ha ha, you're an interesting one, I'll give you that! Haa, a real piece of work!" Izaya wiped a tear away from his eye, "Fine, fine. You can stay. In fact, I insist. It's easier for me to keep an eye on you that way. I'd rather have you under my supervision, so I know what kind of trouble you're getting my face into."

The other raven nodded and even managed to crack a smile. He was glad he could stay with his donor and learn a little more about him.

For he was very interested about the man who was able to go toe to toe with Heiwajima Shizuo, and live to tell the tale.
Misanth-Roppi

Chapter Summary

Roppi and Izaya begin living together. A few banter and misunderstandings along the way.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes.

He was supposed to be sleeping right now, but as usual, he wasn't.

Not too long ago, Izaya and Roppi were still talking, until the informant decided to call it a night. He had told him that he could sleep on the couch.

He also added that he would attack Roppi with extreme prejudice if he wandered into his room or came upstairs at all for that matter. With that being said, he clicked off the lights on his way up the stairs.

Roppi wasn't interested in following him anyway, so he sat on the couch as instructed and got ready to sleep for the night.

But the light that poured into the apartment from the windows beckoned him.

When the lights were off in Shingen's lab, it was completely dark and still, there was nothing else to see. This apartment was illuminated in comparison. The lights pooled in from the windows and slightly colored the room with a soothing blue tint. The tall glass buildings were lit up and dazzled against the dark sky. Millions of lights scattered across the horizon, glittering like tiny pieces of gold.

Roppi couldn't help but move towards the breathtaking view, drifting towards it and placing his hand on the cool glass.

But what captivated Roppi the most was the large full moon that shone brighter than all the lights in the city.

It was big, brilliant and beautiful. Even more than he imagined it to be. He found himself taking a seat in Izaya's big arm chair facing the large apartment windows to gaze out to the night sky.

He leaned forward in his seat, reaching up at the glowing orb, as if trying to grasp it.

Looking at the moon, he saw his friend that was left behind in America.

It's been over a week since he's last seen him. Roppi felt the pressing loneliness now that there was nothing to distract him. He missed talking to him, it put him at ease and it made him feel better after having a shitty day. And he really needed to talk to someone right now, especially after a messed up day like today.

"Hey, it's been a while…you wouldn't believe what happened…I went outside for the first time. I saw humans, got into fights, met two Ikebukuro legends. And I even convinced Shingen to let me live here. Shocking right?"
"I'd like to live with Izaya."

It took a full twenty seconds for Shingen to process that statement, "….HAH?!"

"Before you say no-"

"NO! Out of the question! Do you realize what you're asking me? That snake is most likely responsible for everything that's happened today! What do you think would happen if let you near him?"

"Have a little more faith in your creation will you? You think I can't take him?"

"Oh don't start. Look at you! You've been shot twice in the chest! A four year old girl can beat you!" he reprimanded as he poked Roppi's bandaged chest in an irritating fashion.

Roppi grabbed the offending appendage and twisted it so it was locked behind the doctor's back.

"Owowowowowowoww! You're twisting my finger! It's twisting! That really hurts you know! OW! Alright! Okay! I take it back! You're not that feeble! Let go! Please let go!"

Roppi released the yelping old man. "You've seen me perform with injuries similar to these. Wait, correction, you made me perform with injuries similar to these so that I'd be able to defend myself in situations like this. You should know better than anyone that I can handle a guy like him even if I'm in this condition."

Shingen flexed his fingers experimentally to check for pain, "It's not that I'm worried he'd physically attack you, though he may try to slit your throat in your sleep, but he's the type of guy that will use you, and he will manipulate you to do something stupid, I'm sure of it."

Roppi lifted a brow, "Thanks for the warning, I'll be sure to not follow him blindly and jump off a bridge when he asks me to."

"You'd better not. Why do you want to stay with that guy anyway? You don't even know him, what good will it do you live with him?"

"It's because I don't know him that I want to go live with him. I feel like he'd have answers to most of the questions I have. About both of us."

Shingen cocked his head to the side, "What a ridiculous reason…"

Roppi glared, "To you maybe, but not to me. And don't think hiding me in some random location you find, hoping no one would discover me is a smarter option. If I'm with him, he'd have a better chance of hiding me successfully. He has experience with these kind of things doesn't he?"

Shingen didn't argue right away, so Roppi pressed on, "Besides, I'm sure you can use this as leverage somehow. Knowing you, you'd be able to use this living arrangement to your advantage."

The doctor was silent for once. He seemed to be weighing the options out in his head before finally sighing, "Keeping you out of trouble by getting you into trouble…"

"How is living with him getting me into trouble? It's the only safe option I have right now."

Shingen laughed uncomfortably, "Oh, Roppi-kun. You have no idea."
"I'll have to kick you out if it's a habit of yours to stay up all night, talking to yourself."

Roppi glanced over his shoulder in time to see Izaya descend the last bit of stairs. He was clad in shorts and a baggy grey sweater, his hair looked more ruffled than before, like he rolled out of bed from a good rest.

"Sorry for disturbing you. I didn't think you would have heard me"

Izaya lifted his shoulder in a small shrug, "I've grown accustomed to living alone, and any unusual sound is enough to wake me now. It's handy for detecting things that my burglar alarm can't."

Judging by Roppi's slow nod, he figured that he didn't really understand what he meant by that.

"What I'm saying is; even though I have an advanced alarm system, it's not impossible for someone to disarm it. I know a handful of people who can bypass it with no effort. So, I can't rely on it to keep me safe, I've become a light sleeper as a result. Make sense now?"

Roppi nodded more firmly this time, "You must live a very paranoid life if you can't rest peacefully in your own house."

"Heh, I feel more on edge now that you're here" he remarked as he hopped on the side of his desk and joined Roppi watching the cityscape. "I see you like the view. Great isn't it? It's one of the main reasons why I chose this apartment."

"Yeah, it's beautiful" Roppi agreed.

The informant tapped his chin in mock thought, "Hmmm, I wonder, does a guy like you really know what beauty is? You've been fed information of the outside world from within a lab; you've been taught what beauty was from a third person perspective. You've probably never seen something that qualifies as beautiful in person before. Doesn't that make your opinion bias? Your view of everything is skewed. Everything is new, fascinating, beautiful because for the first time, you are seeing them for yourself. Then wouldn't that mean what you think is beautiful may not be beautiful at all?"

Roppi scoffed, "Does beauty really have to be such a complicated thing? Humans made such a big fuss over such a simple word. What I think is what I think. If I see something that I think it's beautiful, then it's beautiful to me. Does anyone else's opinion matter? Society's collective belief of what is and is not beautiful won't change the fact that I still feel something is. It just means they don't see what I do."

The other raven was delighted with his answer, philosophical banter was always fun. Other people hardly argued about their thoughts of little trivial things, like the scenery in this case, like Izaya liked to. It's the little things in life that people forget to evaluate their opinions on.

"And let me guess, that's why you hate humans?"

"Amongst many other things, yes"

"Always the misanthrope of the group, right Hachi-chan?"

Roppi made a face of distaste at the nickname, "Please, don't call me that"

Roppi's anticlimactic response to his chat nickname made Izaya slump, "Oh come on, what kind of reaction was that? How boring. At least Tanaka Taro-kun was all 'Eeeeh?' when I called him out in real life."
Roppi flinched. Tanaka Taro was one of his online chat buddies. How did Izaya know him? Did that mean Izaya was one too?

And, Roppi realized with disbelief, only one of them would refer to him as 'Hachi-chan'.

"Hold on, are you...Kanra?"

Izaya raised his eyebrows "You're a little slow, aren't you? Who else calls you Hachi-chan?"

Roppi shook his head, "No, only 'Kanra', but my full name is Hachimenroppi. I just supposed that Shingen had told you, and you made up "Hachi-chan" based on that."

Izaya sighed in disappointment, "Ah, that's why. No, he only called you 'Roppi-kun', not by your full name. Heh, Hachimenroppi was it? Such an interesting naming sense Shingen has. But you used a part of your real name in your username? Hadn't Shingen taught you that you shouldn't use your real name online?"

Roppi shook his head "Not really. He left me on my own devices. Though, I didn't see the point of changing my name when I technically don't exist outside the lab."

Izaya hummed thoughtfully. "That's true."

"How did you figure it out? My identity I mean."

"Childs play." He replied with a cocky grin, "You made it too easy for me with all your helpful hints of your guardian; A doctor and scientist who always wore a gas mask, who lives in America and has family in Ikebukuro. There really is only one man under that description. Although at the time, I had no clue who you were. There was absolutely no trace of who Hachi-chan could have been. So I was curious, and I kept an eye out for you to see when you would finally show your face. After all, Hachi-chan wasn't enjoying his time with his guardian and his girlfriend's 'abuse'; I figured it was only a matter of time before you ran away. This morning when he called me about his 'missing human experiment' I realized that he was talking about you."

Roppi frowned as he remembered all the details he spilt to Kanra. He found no harm in it, because he figured there was no way 'she' could figure out who or what he was based on the vague information he told. Ironically, he was talking to a very skilled informant who masterfully pieced all the tidbits of information he gave him, and managed to figure out quite a bit about himself.

But then again, it worked both ways, he now knew a little more about how Izaya talks and thinks, through 'Kanra', one of his faces.

"If there was such thing as fate, I'd say it has a funny sense of humour. I wouldn't have guessed I've been chatting with my donor this entire time."

"Unwilling donor" Izaya corrected, "That Shingen just does whatever he feels like without asking. Imagine how shocked I was when I found out he made you with my stem cells."

"...hold on, you didn't know about me? Then wait...creating me was all his idea?"

"Yes, though I can't say I'm disappointed or angry anymore, after all you turned out to be just what I needed right now~"

"Well I'm angry. Next time I see that stupid lying doctor, I'm going to knock that stupid gas mask off his face"
Izaya laughed, "You do that, but get some rest first. We need to wake up early"

He slid off his spot on the desk and stretched, "I wanted to do this in the morning, but since you're up…" he reached into his pocket and retrieved a cellphone, holding it out for Roppi to take "Here, this is for you."

Roppi regarded the phone in his hand with confusion, "Why? I don't even know how to use it."

"You'll learn. And as for why, you'll be needing it for your new job" he explained as he took Roppi's hand and forced the device into it to take.

Roppi didn't like the way Izaya was smiling, "…what job?"

"Being me of course!" Izaya said, "You didn't think I'd let you stay here for free did you? You need to earn your keep of course! As my shadow warrior!"

"Exciting…"

"I know, right? Here, check the contact list, you'll see my number, and a couple of others."

He looked at the smartphone in his hands, on the screen it prompted him to slide his finger along the bottom to unlock. He did so. Roppi experimentally tapped the square labelled "contacts" and watched in fascination as it enlarged into a list of names and numbers. He paused on the one labeled under the name "Kanra"

"Your chat name?"

"Safety precaution on the off chance someone got that phone, wouldn't you think it's weird that I'd have myself in my contacts? Anyway, I'll show you how to use it tomorrow. It's not too difficult, but I'll go over who the other contacts are in more detail. So be sure to get plenty of sleep, I'll be training you starting tomorrow."

"Thanks…for the cellphone, I mean"

"Don't thank me. It's not a gift"

Roppi snorted, "Thanks anyway."

"…just go to sleep already"

CHATROOM

-Hachimen has entered the chat-

Hachimen: Oh, looks like everyone is still online this late.

Hachimen: Good evening.

Bakyura: Ohh, look who it is! Hachimen-san! How's it going? Haven't heard from you in forever dude!

Hachimen: It's only been three days Bakyura.

Tanaka Taro: True Hachimen-san, but it's been a long three days. A lot has happened in that time. That's exactly why I'm still up, so much happened today I just felt like chatting about all of it.
Hachimen: Oh, that reminds me. I've officially moved to Japan. I'm living with a relative here in Shinjuku.

Hachimen: And today I spent my first day in Ikebukuro.

Bakyura: Oh nice! The turtle finally crawled out of his shell!

Hachimen: Shut it.

Tanaka Taro: Awesome Hachimen-san!

Setton: That's great news! Now you can check out the city like you wanted! We might even run into each other

Saika: Congratulations.

Hachimen: Thanks everyone. Yeah, it was a crazy first day. I saw a lot of chases and fighting. You guys weren't joking when you said Ikebukuro really is a crazy place.

Tanaka Taro: Oh, haha. Today was more chaotic than usual. It was unfortunate that today of all days was your first visit, it must have been a real shock.

Bakyura: Maybe not, he's lucky he got to see the action-packed side of the city right? It's like the city put on a show to welcome you!

Tanaka Taro: Haha, I guess you can see it that way. So what did you think of Ikebukuro? Did you like it? What did you see?

Hachimen: I didn't get to do much, but I got to admit, I saw some pretty amazing things. The buildings, the plazas, everything was so lively. I even got to see the Black Rider and Heiwajima Shizuo in action. It was awesome.

Hachimen: Even though I ran into some annoyances along the way, I still liked it. It was…nice to get out and I'm glad I came.

Setton: That's good for you Hachimen-san. I'm glad you liked it. Oh, and before I forget…Welcome to Japan~

Hachimen: Thank you Setton. I'm looking forward to my stay

Clap, clap, clap.

'Ah, this dream again.'

He turned to see that face he loved to hate.

A younger version of Izaya sat on a bench, smirking at him as Shinra introduced him for the first time. He would always have that knowing look in his eyes. He knew nothing about him, he had no fucking right to look at him like that. It pissed him off then, and still pissed him off now.

And he made his feelings known. "You piss me off."

"Oh?" he responded assessing Shizuo's expression for a moment "…that's too bad. I thought you and I could have a little fun"
"Shut up."

"Aw, don't be like that Shizuo-kun."

That's all it took for Shizuo to charge at him. It never really took much for Izaya to set him off. He always knew what to say to get under his skin.

He swung his fist at him, which Izaya swiftly dodged. The bench he sat at splintered into pieces, briefly obscuring his vision. He lost sight of him for a moment.

And Izaya used that window of opportunity to slice Shizuo's chest with his blade.

"See? Isn't this fun?"

Shizuo yelled out in fury and chased Izaya.

It was just like he remembered; except when he ran around the corner, rather than coming face to face with a speeding truck, he stumbled onto the sight of Izaya laying in a puddle of blood.

He stumbled to a stop and stared in shock.

How did that happen? He was fine a second ago…

No, wait. This was wrong, Shizuo was the one who ended up hurt here.

Shizuo wasn't sure how he ended up at his side. "Izaya..? Hey wake up, get a hold of yourself!"

Izaya blinked up at him, surprise clear on his face, then he smirked softly, "Isn't this what you wanted? For me to die?"

"What? No, no! I didn't!" he glanced around frantically looking for help, but strangely the whole street was empty.

"Heh, even after all I did, you really are a nice guy aren't you? I knew it."

"You…"

"I'm just happy I got to meet you…nice to know…m' not alone" his voice got quieter after every word.

Shizuo sucked in a deep breath as eyes snapped open. He was awake, back in his bedroom, but the dream was still vivid in his mind.

Usually after having that dream when he first met Izaya, he'd be too pissed to go to sleep.

But today, it was different.

He must be going into shock or something from helping the flea for the first time. After all, he's always hated Izaya.

'No," Shizuo thought has he ran his hand through his hair, 'that's not really true.'

It was hard to believe when he thought about it now, but there was a point in time when he could 'tolerate' Izaya's presence. Don't get him wrong, he's always thought he was a piece of shit that could go to hell for all he cared, but back then, he didn't necessarily want to send him there personally.
He used to feel there was a sort of understanding between them. They were both strange. They were both social deviants. Nobody made the mistake to get too close with either of them. For that reason, they were closest to each other in a way, because of their dislike for each other.

As much as they detested each other, they had a begrudging respect for their rival. Izaya admired Shizuo's strength, while Shizuo respected Izaya's charisma. Though neither of them admitted it out loud. It was the closest thing either of them would get to a connection with another person.

And then, that piece of shit went and got him arrested.

Though his name was cleared, his boss fired him for getting in trouble while on probation as a result. It was the job he promised Kasuka that he would keep, and do his best in.

Izaya made him break his promise to his little brother, and for that reason he hated him beyond words.

So how could he let himself get fooled by fake pleading eyes and a couple of pretty words?

Shizuo thought back to that moment in the alley. Even if he was able to go back and fix it, he still couldn't imagine himself actually killing him.

Fine, so he couldn't kill him. But that's because he was against violence…

Yet Izaya looked like he was at his end. Didn't people spill their deepest secrets when they were about to die? So then he meant what he said?

"I'm just happy I got to meet you"

"Damn it" he cursed.

Those words have been ringing in his ears like an annoying song he couldn't get out of his head, and he just wanted it to stop. It was like he was starting to believe in Izaya, believe that he might have a heart beneath all the heaps of bullshit and lies.

'So what now? Does this change anything?'

He'd never thought it was possible to be on good terms with Izaya. But that moment he didn't feel angry, even with him standing right in front of him, all his anger simmered down, and he felt calm for once. He couldn't deny it felt good. He was in control of his temper, in front of Izaya of all people, and it felt like a long-suffering weight had lifted off his chest. And against his better judgement, he sided with him.

He let him go when he could have beat him up. He fought for him, when he could have handed him over. He even rushed him to help and even gave up some of his own blood to keep him alive.

Once upon a time he would have considered using this opportunity to put their differences aside and just move on from trying to kill each other.

But he knows he can't trust him. After years of experience, he's learned that much.

He resolved to deal with it in the morning.

Maybe go over to Shinra's to check if Izaya died yet.

"WAAAAAKE UP ROPPI-CHAAAAAAAN~!!!!~!"
The boy in question woke up with a start. The remnants of a strange dream faded from the forefront of his mind.

"Ughh..." Roppi clapped his hands over his ears to block out the loud clanging noise that filled the room.

Roppi growled from his sleeping spot on the couch, "Shut up you stupid doct-..."

He cut himself off as he regained his bearings, and realized that he was not in the lab anymore, and that wasn't Shingen standing over him banging a spoon and a pan together.

"Rise and shine sleepyhead!" Izaya grinned at his ruffled and clearly aggravated twin, "Didn't I tell you to go to sleep early? Now look at you, you nearly slept in! Aren't I such a considerate roommate to wake you up?"

Roppi groaned again and let his head fall back on the couch. He spent most of the night getting accustomed to his new phone, it was too fascinating to put down. He discovered how to access the chatroom, and stayed up longer talking with his online chat buddies. It goes without saying he didn't get much sleep.

"Oy. I said get up." Izaya said while prodding Roppi's head with the pan, "I'm expecting a guest soon, and you can't be lying around when they come. So if you want breakfast, you'd wash up quickly and eat before they arrive since you'll be out of sight the whole time they're here."

Roppi resigned and pushed himself into a sitting position, his jacket he used as a makeshift blanket slipped off his body. "Fine…where do I wash up?"

Izaya pointed behind him, "Bathroom's upstairs, second door on the left. It's the only door that I left open. I also left a towel and a change of clothes and a pretty pink toothbrush for you. You're welcome." he smirked.

Roppi's eyebrow twitched as he wordlessly collected his jacket and headed to the stairs, wondering if Izaya was kidding or if he really bought pink toothbrushes. He got the distinct impression that Izaya was doing everything within his power to annoy him. It was like living with Shingen all over again.

Izaya took out his phone as soon as his twin reached the second floor.

He dialed Shingen's number. 'Might as well get my story straight before Shiki gets here. I wouldn't want to tell him a completely different story than Kishitani-san.'

Roppi entered the bathroom and found a change of clothes and utensils set out for him on the large marble counter. He grimaced when he spotted the glittery pink toothbrush. Upon closer inspection, it looked like a children's brush, probably for a girl.

He looked over to the toothbrush holder sitting on the counter, Izaya's plain white adult sized toothbrush sat daintily in its spot.

Roppi frowned. If he bought regular ones, couldn't he have given him a normal one instead?

More importantly, why did he have a child's toothbrush on hand? How often do kids come to Izaya's apartment?

A little disturbed, Roppi set those thoughts aside and lifted his shirt up over his head, ignoring the sting of the stitches in his bandaged chest and he picked up a towel, "I guess there really is a lot I don't know about him. I'm…not sure if I want to know though…"
Several minutes later, Roppi emerged from the bathroom feeling refreshed and more awake. He was about to head on to the first floor, but paused when he heard voices as he approached the stairs. He remained near the banister to listen more closely to the conversation. The voices seemed to come from the sitting area, meaning he wouldn't be able to see them from his vantage point, but that also meant he was safe from being seen as he eavesdropped.

"You're looking well Shiki" he heard Izaya say.

"…and you as well," came another deeper, unfamiliar voice. "for someone who was shot yesterday."

A quiet laugh was his response, "What good would it do me to show weakness in my profession?"

"Hn" the visitor responded with a hum.

In the sitting area, Izaya gestured to the ready-made teapot on the table. "Feel free to help yourself, you did come all the way after all."

Shiki surveyed Izaya carefully, "Alright. Pour me some, since you don't want to show any weakness right?"

Izaya's smile looked a little forced now. "You sadist..."

He would have no problem getting up and pouring the tea, but he couldn't let Shiki know that. He was supposedly injured. So he'd have to put on a risky show for the ever-perceptive Shiki. Izaya was great at lying, he prided himself on being one of the few people who could get away with lying to Shiki without getting caught; but even he knew when not to push his luck and take unnecessary risks.

Before he could decide what to do, Shiki wordlessly reached for the teapot and poured himself a cup of tea. "Relax, I'm not so heartless to make you stress your wounds like that. You should have stayed under Kishitani-sensei's care. I was surprised that you were already gone when I got there this morning. You should be resting for at least a week, no excuses."

Izaya scoffed, "And be a sitting duck while Shizu-chan knows where I am? Whatever reason he had to help me may not be good enough for him the next day. He may have come to his senses overnight and attacked me this morning. He's an unpredictable brute, I'd rather not stay somewhere where he knows where to find me while I'm powerless to fight him."

"So it was true that he helped you yesterday. Why is that?"

"Hmph, I never know what he's thinking. Yesterday was no exception."

Shiki lifted a full cup to his lips, "Why don't you explain to me a little more about what happened yesterday?"

"Oh you know, the usual. Exchanged pleasantries with a few clients, walked around the city, got shot. Nothing too out of the ordinary."

"I'm sure…and what about when you assaulted one of my delivery men? You realize that whole fiasco would have been avoided if you didn't cause such a scene."

"Alright that was a little stupid…but you have to admit, it was pretty funny."

Shiki did not look amused.
"Fine, fine. I admit I wasn't thinking clearly. All I knew was I didn't want to get caught in a sticky situation. I reacted without thinking; a momentary lapse of judgement."

"What about what you took from the truck? Was that also a momentary lapse of judgement?"

"Really, Shiki? After all the years we've known each other, you'd blame me for theft?"

"Izaya…" A harsh, but not accusing tone.

The younger man smiled politely, "I don't recall taking anything from that truck, I didn't even realize it was heading to Awakusu-kai territory until after I got out. I boarded it by pure coincidence to get out of Nebula undetected. So how would I know if any of the cargo was of significance? Besides, if you actually believed I took something, we wouldn't be having such a civil conversation, now would we?"

Shiki said nothing to that and took another sip of his tea. "Tell me about your run in with Aozaki-san's group."

"Nothing you haven't heard from your men, I'm sure. Ken and the rest of them approached me, I tried talking first, but it was Satoshi who fired the first shot, rendering all negotiation useless"

He was glad he had Kida tailing his lookalike; those reports were definitely coming in handy right now.

"Yet I hear you managed to talk your way out of the second time he pointed his gun at you, you always manage to weasel your way out of a tight spot"

Upstairs, Roppi's brow furrowed as he eavesdropped. 'What is he talking about? That never happened'

This guy was trying to catch Izaya in a lie, he's been doing it the whole conversation. So far, Izaya managed to counter the little traps correctly (he wasn't entirely sure how), but Izaya would make a slip up eventually. Roppi took his phone out.

"Well- ah, excuse me." Izaya paused as he felt his phone vibrate with a new message notification. He was careful to make slow, slightly pained movements.

Surprisingly, when he checked the new message, he found it was from his twin hiding upstairs.

Hachi-chan: [He's testing you. That never happened.]

His lips quirked in amusement and he placed the phone back down. Roppi was trying to help him out, how noble. But his efforts were unnecessary, he wasn't a top informant for nothing.

"Anything important?" Shiki asked.

"No, nothing I can't leave 'til later. Now, I believe you said a second time? You must be mistaken, Shiki-san, your mole only held me at gunpoint once, the rest of the time Shizuo was giving him enough grief to keep him busy after that."

The older man leaned back in his seat taking in the silence that followed Izaya's answer. "I see. I apologize for the excessive questioning. It's facts I want, and I plan to get the truth. The fact of the matter is that yesterday was a very distressing day for us, and your actions were far from reassuring. But by speaking with you directly, I can go back to the boss with full confidence and tell him that you had nothing to do with yesterday's information leak."
"Weird, I thought you've already figured out who was behind that. Satoshi-san was kind enough to tell you wasn't he?"

"I wanted to be no less than a hundred percent sure you are guilt free. And I also needed to cover all my bases, you know that. Which leads me to the other reason why I'm here," Shiki slipped his hand into his expensive suit to retrieve a thick envelope (no doubt filled with money) from his inner pocket and placed it on the table. "I need you to look into Yodogiri Jinnai. Anything you can find will be helpful. He's hard to track, we've tried many times in the past, but now we can't waste time finding him"

"So you're pawning him off to me?"

"I'm entrusting this job to you. He has sensitive information of ours, and we need to silence him before he does anything with it. If he has spread it, then we need to know where and silence them too. It's entirely possible another group offers him protection in exchange for the information, then we'd run into a possibility of a war. But we'd rather just find him and deal with him alone before it gets to that point. You're the best informant for this job, you've butted heads with that guy in the past, and so you have a better idea than anyone who we're dealing with. Any other person wouldn't know where to start, and time is a luxury that we can't afford right now. And I know you're itching to pay him back for those two bullets you took to the chest. I trust you'll help us track the pest down?"

Izaya drummed his fingers on his knee as he thought it over. "...tell me I'm the best again."

"Don't push it"

Shiki and Izaya chatted for a few minutes longer before the yakuza executive announced that he should get going.

The group showed themselves out the same way they let themselves enter. Izaya remained in his seat on the couch, bidding them a cheerful farewell.

He sat there in silence, concentrating on the noises outside. He could hear faint murmuring and footsteps getting further and further away. When he was completely sure that they all left, he called out, "You can come down now"

Soft footsteps made themselves known as Roppi descended the stairs, "Yakuza?" he questioned when he came into view.

Just by listening to the guest's voice, Roppi could tell the man had an imposing aura that all but demanded respect. The way he talked was very calm and collected, yet managed to be threatening at the same time. Roppi felt himself cringe a little every time Izaya blatantly lied to him. Which was more or less through the entire conversation.

"Yes, that was Shiki and his men from the Awakusu group. The ones you got involved with yesterday. I can't decide if it was a blessing or a curse that you decided to leave Shinra's place last night. If they visited you this morning, given that they were granted an audience with you, Shiki would have known that you were an imposter in a second. But the fact that I left Shinra's place so quickly makes it look like I have something to worry about, something to hide. I'm not in the red anymore, which is good. But if this visit is anything to go by, Shiki still doesn't trust me fully. Then again, when has he ever?" Izaya shrugged, eyes filled with mischief.

Roppi noticed that Izaya looked a little worse for wear. "You look pale. Are you alright?"

"Oh this? It's just makeup. I needed to look like I was shot, normal people wouldn't have regained
their normal complexion overnight you know."

That's when Roppi noticed the bandages covering his shoulders peeking out from underneath his shirt. It was exactly like the bindings around his own torso. He pulled out all the stops to make it look like he got shot.

"…where did you get the makeup from?"

"An informant must always be prepared. Lesson number one." He responded vaguely.

"Uh huh…" he trailed off when his stomach gave a loud rumble.

Izaya laughed as his twin's ears went pink. "I take it you're hungry. Lucky for you, breakfast is already ready."

Izaya went into the kitchen, Roppi awkwardly followed him, a little unsure of what to do with himself as Izaya put his breakfast on his plate. He decided to take a seat at the table as he waited.

He didn't have to wait too long, Izaya balanced two plates and two glasses and set it down on the table in front of him. A large fluffy yellow omelet sat on the plate, the steam was still wafting off the surface. It smelled delicious.

Izaya took a ketchup bottle and squirted his name on his. He turned to Roppi, "What do you want me to write on yours?"

Roppi looked from the bottle to Izaya, "…you seem a little too prepared for this, have you been waiting for a roommate or something?"

Izaya's eye twitched. He squirted random lines all over Roppi's omelet.

This time Roppi's eyebrow twitched when he realized Izaya wrote the kanji for 'alien' on his food.

He didn't care a second later, he was starving. He dug into his meal, realizing it actually 'Omu-rice', a Japanese style dish that Emilia tried to make once.

"This is really good" he commented.

"Of course it is, I cooked it" Izaya replied without a hint of modesty.

The two ate in silence after that, eating their meals quietly. Roppi felt the need to say something as he nearly cleared off his plate.

"I'm sorry I got you into this mess."

The other raven looked confused, "What do you mean?"

"I'm the one who attacked that delivery man, and now the Awakusu group has you under suspicion because of what I did."

Izaya laughed, "If you didn't get mad about me setting up that Dollars chase, then why should I get mad about something as little as that? It's nothing I can't handle."

"But they think you know what their secret weapon is, and trust you less. Wouldn't that cause you more problems in the long run?"

"But I do know what their 'secret weapon' is, silly boy, so technically they have a right to be wary of
Roppi looked up from his empty plate, perplexed, "You know? How?"

"Who do you think I am Roppi-chan? Even if the Awakusu-kai and Nebula worked together, they can't hide a secret that big from Orihara Izaya."

He stood up from his chair taking the dirty plates to the sink, "It's surprising that they've managed to keep that huge bomb quiet for so long. But it was only a matter of time the secret got out."

"Higher"

"Make it tighter around the sides"

"You're not trying hard enough! Again, like you mean it!"

"…"

"Alright close. Well? What do you two think?"

Namie stood with her arms crossed, head cocked to the side in consideration, "…I agree that there's something missing, since I don't feel like slapping that smile off his face."

Kida's hand was on his chin as he nodded seriously, "Mhmm, try to make it a little more creepier, like you're a sex offender or something"

"Oy, what kind of mean things are you saying about my smile?" Izaya pouted.

Roppi dropped the smile the three of them have been working so hard to construct.

"This is ridiculous, do I really have to do this? Does it really matter if I smile exactly like you or not?" he said. His cheeks hurt from keeping it up for half an hour now; he was never going to get use to smiling like that for a long period of time, or smiling at all for that matter. He's never had to either.

"Of course you do. How else are you going to convince people that you're me?"

"Everyone was pretty convinced that I was you the other day."

"Yes, that one day you managed to fool people. But if you're going to be doing this for an extended period of time we need to be careful and precise. People are going to start noticing that the way you act is completely different from the way I act. It'll attract unwanted attention, don't you think? You'll be figured out before too long. To prevent that from happening, you need to put on a convincing act. So, again! Smiiiiiiile!" Izaya said as he pinched Roppi's cheeks and pulled them upwards.

He looked pretty comical with his lips pulled into a wide smile, and his eyes glaring daggers at the man in front of him.

After several more failed attempts, and one perfect execution, Izaya finally announced that they should take a break.

Namie went to her desk and started flipping through files from a huge pile that had been sitting there. Kida on the other hand came and sat next to Roppi.

"I still don't get why you decided to work with him Roppi-san. You really don't have to do this you know."
Roppi didn't respond. Instead he fiddled with the blade Izaya gave to him, an exact replica of the one the informant carried around. Flicking it open and delicately fingering the blade.

After weeks of living with the informant, he gained some semblance of trust, enough that Izaya was willing to let him hold on to a weapon, such as the one he was holding, for practising purposes so that he can learn how Izaya fought. But keeping it on his person was a different story, the ever paranoid informant collected all weapons when practise was over. He even went as far as to lock the kitchen cabinet that held the knives other sharp objects.

But, he supposed, he didn't really trust Izaya either, so it was only fair the feeling was reciprocated.

"You don't even enjoy doing this," Kida pressed on, "Dude, I can see the way you're forcing yourself to do everything he asks. If that's how it is, shouldn't you just quit?"

Roppi sighed and folded the knife, "Isn't that the same case for you? I'm here because I want to be. What about you? Why are you here if you hate his guts?"

Kida said nothing.

Roppi watched Kida out of the corner of his eye. He internally scoffed, 'He says he doesn't understand why I decided to come to Izaya, even though he himself despises him and still does his dirty work for him. Humans are so hypocritical.'

Kida fidgeted uncomfortably, "It's complicated alright? Look, I just don't want you to get wrapped up in something that you can't get yourself out of, like I did. Someone you care about could get hurt."

"I appreciate the concern. But it's not necessary. I'm unlike most people; I have no one else in my life to get involved. So I have nothing to worry about."

"Is that so… Well, don't say I never warned you" Kida said before changing what he felt was a sensitive subject. "How are your injuries?"

Roppi placed a hand on his chest, feeling the healed scars beneath his shirt.

It's been three weeks since the incident in Ikebukuro. The time flew by in a blink of an eye, filled with information to give Roppi enough knowledge to convince others that he was who he was pretending to be. Izaya taught him how he talked to people, how he carried himself, how he fought and Roppi would have to follow all of his teachings to the letter.

He also spent the time learning what Izaya does as an informant. He'd do things like tracking people and valuables, communicating with clients, and keeping on top of events going on in surrounding cities, or in some cases other countries altogether. That was just a glimpse at what he does. And by the looks of it, Izaya was very good at what he did, and was also very thorough in teaching Roppi the tricks of the trade.

True to his word, Izaya fully planned to have Roppi be his 'shadow warrior' of sorts. When he was ready, he would go out to meet with Izaya's more risky clients and track his more dangerous targets. Namely Yodogiri Jinnai. The rival informant has proven to be more dangerous and resourceful that Izaya had anticipated, and for that he needed a scapegoat (Roppi) to draw him out.

As much as it annoyed him to know he was being used like a pawn on a chessboard, Roppi tolerated it for the reason that he would get the chance to get close enough to Yodogiri. Perhaps close enough to clock him in the face for trying to kill him.
Alright, break time is over. Let's move on.” Izaya announced cheerfully.

Namie called out from her desk, "Forget it, I won't be joining this round. As amusing it is to watch you two play pretend, some of us here have lots of work to do. Digging up all records we have of Yodogiri Jinnai isn't as easy as it sounds."

"Ah, right. I suppose I did ask you to do that. Kida why don't you go help her? Since you'll be gathering information on him as well, it'll help you get a good basis on your search."

Kida nodded indifferently and made his way to Namie's workstation.

"So that leaves the two of us, how about we do something different. We'll go over people I know and how I talk with them"

"Okay…"

They went over several people he talked with often over the past few weeks. Most of them were clients he worked with in the past, a couple of intel contacts and a few enemies he made in the past. For the most part Izaya talked to all of them the same way, just a few variations of respect here and there. There were a few things he had to take note, like nicknames for one, or that Izaya would only push a certain person's buttons so far.

Roppi wondered if he'd ever get the hang of acting like someone else, it felt wrong to him. He hated the idea of pretending to be something he wasn't. Like Shingen.

"Hmm I got a good one, Hachimenroppi. Or Roppi for short. Yes, that's a good name for a smart boy of many talents such as yourself."

"Roppi-kun, it's either you suffer now, or you suffer later on."

"Quit acting embarrassed and call me Papa already!"

"Run it all at full throttle. Let's see if he can take it."

Roppi swallowed thickly and willed those memories away, they were unnecessary right now.

Yes, acting like someone he was against his morals; the only reason he was okay with it was because he'd cause less trouble for Izaya and himself if he went along with it. It was for the sake of survival. If he wanted to co-exist with Izaya in the outside world, he needed to do this to keep his identity a secret.

Besides, he already did it once before. In that van where he met Kida and he played along acting like Izaya so that they wouldn't become suspicious. Luckily, they bought it, even the one who seemed to be a close friend of Izaya's.

"I just remembered…there's a guy named Kadota, or Dota-chin. You haven't mentioned him yet."

"That's because he's a secret lover of mine."

Everyone in the room froze in shock (and varying levels of disgust from Kida and Namie) at his declaration.

Izaya laughed, "Geez, I'm joking obviously. He's just an old acquaintance from high school, we
went to Raijin together, we talk whenever we bump into each other, we catch up, I tease him, he mostly ignores it, that's about it"

"Raijin, that's the school you, Shinra and Heiwajima Shizuo went to right? Shinra already knows about me, so I don't really have to pretend in front of him. What about Heiwajima-san? How do you talk to him?"

Izaya's smile didn't look nearly as sincere anymore, "You don't, Roppi-chan. We don't talk to protozoans. It's a waste of time and energy, it's better to avoid him altogether."

It's been a whole month since he's last seen the flea.

After days of debating, he managed to convince himself to go and visit him at Shinra's apartment at least; only to find out that Izaya had already recovered and left.

Shizuo was on guard the following week. That parasite would show up unexpectedly like he always did, skipping down the street like he owned it. Inevitably pissing him off and they'd be back to where they were before. Mutual enemies; fighting each other like it was the natural thing to do. No confusion, no hesitation and definitely no mercy.

And Shizuo could finally forget about those words Izaya said that day. And he would know that it was a bunch of bullshit he said to trick him into saving him.

But he never came.

Days past, then weeks, before he knew it, it was already a month since he's so much caught a whiff of Izaya.

'Well good. He's sticking to his promise. I would kill him if showed his sorry face around here.'

Next to him, Tom quirked his lips in amusement as he watched his younger peer. It was obvious he was upset, but it wasn't the usual mad Shizuo. Today's Shizuo was more…indignant than mad. The fuming blond was angrily smoking the cigarette in his mouth, white clouds wafting out his lips and nose. He looked like an irritated dragon, blowing out smoke like there was fire in his lungs. He couldn't help but chuckle at the imagery.

"Something on your mind?" he decided to ask.

"Huh?" Shizuo finally turned to acknowledge him.

Tom shrugged, "You're agitated, why is that?"

Shizuo just blinked, unagitated, why is that?

Shizuo just blinked, unaware he was being obvious, and sighed. "I can't figure how I feel right now, and it's annoying"

Tom smiled, "How about you talk about it? It helps to say it out loud, instead of keeping it in and confusing yourself more."

"I guess..." Shizuo took another drag of his cigarette, "I'm having second thoughts about someone. I'm starting to think that maybe this guy has some decency in him."

Tom nodded, "I see, and is that a bad thing?"

"Yeah, because he's a manipulative louse, and he could be tricking me into thinking like this."
Tom wondered if Shizuo knew how revealing he was being about this 'anonymous' person that was plaguing his thoughts.

"Hmm, I see your dilemma. But, I get the feeling you're not convinced he's tricking you though"

Shizuo looked at him, "Why do you say that?"

"Because you wouldn't be so uncertain about it if you knew for sure."

"The flea is probably getting better at his shitty acting then. Arghh I can't trust him after all!"

Even though Shizuo said that with absolute resolution in his voice, he knew that wasn't the case. Izaya never asked for his help before, but that day he practically begged for it. He showed respect to Celty and himself, which he refused to do in the past. He got off his high-horse for once and sought help from people he considered beneath him. He showed weakness to other people, and it looked like he didn't even care about the consequences.

It was then, for the first time in the years he has known him, where Izaya looked like an honest human being to Shizuo.

Shizuo ran a frustrated hand through his blond locks. His thoughts kept going in an endless cycle of doubt and never reached a conclusion. Is Izaya actually a good guy? Was he just faking it? He just kept going around in circles, and what's worse, it was going circles around Izaya.

'Damn that fucking flea,' he cursed. Next time he sees Izaya, he'd kick his ass for doing this to him.

"Listen, this isn't something you can figure out without seeing him again. If you think he tricked you the last time to get out of trouble, then the next time you see him, he'd act like he normally would right?"

Shizuo thought about it. He supposed that made sense. He just needed to see him again, then he'd know if Izaya had changed or not.

A couple standing not too far from where they were sitting suddenly exploded into a big argument, drawing the attention of both men and several other surrounding people.

Tom only raised an eyebrow at the scene, "Weren't they all lovey-dovey a second ago? I wonder what happened."

Shizuo agreed, a moment ago the two of them were smiling and holding hands, neither looked stressed or upset with the other at all. The argument seemed to come out of nowhere.

It reminded him of what Izaya use to do, cause chaos out of the calm, shattering the peace and causing unhappiness wherever he went. All for his entertainment. That's the kind of person Izaya was, and Shizuo needed to keep that in mind.

The once happy couple was now fed up with yelling and parted ways without looking back.

Shizuo watched the two of them leave. He growled suddenly and crushed the cigarette he was holding with a clenched fist.

Tom brought his attention back to his bodyguard, worried about his sudden change of attitude, "Something wrong Shizuo?"

"Nothing Tom-san, something just reeks…"
"Why am I wearing this?"

"You can't figure that out yourself? If we're going out together, then you definitely need to hide your face. Or you'll attract-"

"Unwanted attention, I know. Aren't I attracting a lot of attention anyway?" he grumbled, "No matter how you look at it, I look really suspicious right now."

They were walking down the streets in Ikebukuro at night. Izaya had something in mind for him, but he didn't specify what exactly.

It was the second time he set foot outside; needless to say he was on edge the whole time. It mostly had to do with the fact he was getting looks again. But this time it probably was due to his attire.

He had a black hat on and big sunglasses that obscured half his face. To top it all off, Izaya had also insisted he wore a surgical mask that covered the rest of his face. The only familiar thing about his attire was his usual coat.

He couldn't resist pulling up his hood to avoid the scrutiny of the people passing by. This was embarrassing. He felt like a criminal, hiding his identity from the unsuspecting public, which wasn't that far from the truth when he thought about it.

Thankfully, Izaya led them into a building, saving him from all the weird stares he was getting. It was like he was reliving the Dollars incident. Those stares made him want to run and hide where they couldn't find him.

They made their way to the top of the building. The roof was large and deserted, Izaya gestured him in and locked the door behind them. As usual, Roppi was drawn to the view and made his way to the edge of the roof.

He dropped his hood and slipped off his shades now that there was no one here to see them.

Izaya seized his hand before he pulled his mask down, "Keep the mask and the hat on, we're out of sight, not invisible. You'll never know who's looking this way."

Roppi grumbled but complied, "So what are we doing here?"

"Killing two birds with one stone" Izaya said, passing him a pair of binoculars. "I'm here on the job, keeping tabs on some people, and you will watch as well, working on your human observation skills."

The building they were on had a great view of several squares and streets where people were roaming; there were hardly any other buildings obstructing their view. It was a perfect spot to observe humans, of course Izaya would know the best places for that.

Roppi looked skeptically at the piece of equipment he passed him. Izaya was already looking through his own pair, pointing to various people in the crowds below.

"Over there, that kid is thinking of stealing that guy's wallet. See the way he's tracking him?"

"That guy is over-brimming with confidence. He's looking to prove his worth to the world. I bet if I nudged him the right way, he'd do some reeeeally stupid things."

"Wow, that girl is still showing her face in public? I thought she'd still be hiding in her room after that video incident. I love it when humans surprise me with their boldness."
"Aaaand there's today's target." Izaya said as he fished his pocket for his phone, and hit a button on it without looking. "Keep your eye on the couple in the square, girl in the blue dress, and the boy in the red shirt near the center."

Roppi found them fairly easily, they were holding hands walking leisurely in the square. The boy paused as he pulled out his phone and his expression morphed into shock, and then it darkened just as quickly. He released the girl's hand and started shouting at her, showing her the picture he received on his phone. The girl's face flushed deep red, and she began yelling back.

And just like that, the seemingly perfect couple crumbled into a verbal wrestling match.

Izaya laughed at the scene, "What a beautiful display of emotions, bravo you two!"

"Was that necessary?" Roppi sighed.

"Oh yes, definitely. He paid me to find out what she did on his spare time. They're a moderately new couple, so he doesn't know everything he wanted to know about her. I just let him in on a few of her secrets"

"...that was creepy of him. I mean, they're a new couple, and he went and hired an informant to spy on his new girlfriend, isn't that delving into stalker territory?"

"Of course it is, but I'm not going to tell him that, that would've spoiled the fun. He was head over heels for her and wanted to surprise her by taking her to places she liked without her having to tell him. What he didn't know was that she's going out with several other guys as well, he was one of the many. The look on his face was priceless."

Roppi shook his head, and Izaya continued to enjoy the show.

"Hahaha! Look, he's probably saying something like 'did you think I wouldn't find out?' and she's probably yelling 'You creep! You can't just follow me around!' It's funny, even when they've been caught doing something bad, they continue accusing each other for doing something wrong. Those types of humans are always entertaining to mess with…"

He was having lots of fun, Roppi could tell. For the life of him, he couldn't understand why. Their fight was the height of typical human stupidity in his eyes, he had already lost interest. He went on to scan the other people in the square. He might as well be productive while he was up here.

Roppi's eyes widened a fraction as his eyes landed on a face he wasn't expecting to see.

It's been a month, but it felt longer since he's last seen Heiwajima Shizuo. He sat on a bench, looking normal, yet so extraordinary all at once.

The fortissimo of Ikebukuro was clad in his usual bartender uniform. His tie and the first two buttons of his shirt was undone, he probably removed them after finishing a long day at work; it revealed his neck and a bit of his collarbone. His blond locks looked soft under the lights streetlamps and neon signs, a little ruffled and unkempt, but still suited him well. And his eyes, fortunately weren't hidden by his sunglasses, which were neatly folded away in his vest pocket. Those hazel browns, deep and brooding, were focused on something, narrowing slightly in displeasure. The crease that formed in between his eyebrows might as well be a blaring warning sign to whomever he was watching to stop whatever it is they were doing, or incur Shizuo's wrath.

But Roppi couldn't deny that he thought it would be an appealing sight. Watching the feats Shizuo performed the last time when he was angry left him in awe. He really hoped he would get to see it again tonight.
But seeing him like this, relaxed and laid back (a little stressed now that he thought about it), was nice too. Roppi supposed he wouldn't be too out of line to say that he looked good like this, to put it lightly...

"Hey, are you listening?"

"Mhmm" Roppi hummed back absentmindedly.

It didn't pass by Izaya (little does anyway) that he was looking at a completely different spot in the plaza.

He turned on him with a knowing grin, "Found something interesting?"

Realizing that he was caught, he instantly snapped to attention, "No, it's nothing," he said turning towards the center of the plaza again. "Is that couple still fighting?"

Izaya nodded and pointed to where the two were still going at it, "They should still be there, they shouldn't be too hard to find, they're making quite the scene."

Roppi trained his binoculars on the couple again. While he went on to observe them, Izaya pointed his own binoculars at the direction his double was looking at moments prior.

'Now what was it that distracted you from my lesson, Roppi-kun?'

He scanned through the faces in the crowd with an expert eye, analysing each person for anything particularly unusual.

None of them seemed to stick out in the crowd as a valid distraction that would peak Roppi's interest.

Izaya figured whatever or whoever Roppi was looking at might be in a different spot, either they moved or he misjudged the angle Roppi was holding his binoculars.

He was about to move on, but he stopped when he spotted a familiar face sitting on a park bench.

Izaya bit his lip, 'Shizu-chan...'

It figures. Roppi wasn't interested in humans like he was after all. It would have been odd if he was looking at anything else.

Looking back at Roppi, he realized he abandoned watching the bickering couple (who had already dispersed), and went back to observing Shizuo.

That feeling in his gut returned, that same one he felt when he heard Shizuo was helping his twin. A feeling that he got because Roppi managed to do something that he was never able to do himself.

"What did you say to Shizu-chan to get him to help you?"

"W-What?" Roppi blanched in surprise and mortification that he got caught staring.

"There's no way he would have helped me out during the Dollars manhunt. So, what did you tell him? I'm curious how you managed to deceive that simpleton."

"I don't know what you're talking about. He just helped me on his own." Roppi muttered refusing to meet the other raven's eyes.

Izaya highly doubted that was the case, his face reflected his incredulity, "Hah? Shizu-chan would
never do that on his own violation. A snowball has a better chance surviving in hell than that happening. It's ludicrous to even consider it."

"No, I'm serious. He was about to beat me up, but he decided not to on his own violation."

"You must've said something. Did he know you weren't me? Is that why?"

Roppi shook his head, "No, he kept calling me by your name. He didn't seem to think I was someone else."

"Heh, of course not. His pea-brain wouldn't be able to realise something like that all by himself."

Roppi smirked wryly, "You even sound like an angry ex-girlfriend in person, Kanra-san."

Izaya shot him a look then lifted his binoculars again, "Quiet, or you'll be sleeping outside today."

"Why can't you just admit that Shizuo is a nice guy when it comes down to it?"

Izaya didn't answer, instead he jutted his chin towards the spot he was viewing, "Over there, tell me why those two are angry at each other."

Roppi mercifully let the subject drop and mirrored his twin's actions. There were two young girls, who by all outward appearances looked like they were friends enjoying each other's company.

But after Izaya's coaching for the past few weeks, Roppi was able to spot little signals that told him otherwise.

Their smiles were too tight to be natural, they were forcing them. A frown would appear a few times as they talked; too quickly to catch unless you were looking for it. And their eyes wouldn't meet unless absolutely necessary.

They hated each other, yet they continued put on airs as if they were on good terms.

As usual, humans were so effortlessly vile. It was disgusting.

Chapter End Notes

LONG chapter as an apology for my absence. All I'm really doing is editing these bad boys whenever I get the time and post them up here, it gives me the chance to look out for grammar/spelling as well as continuity and contextual errors, PLUS I get the chance to refamiliarize myself with what I've written so far.

Glossary
Shadow warrior: During times of war, generals would use look-alikes to dress up as themselves to protect themselves from enemy soldiers.

Thanks for reading, I hope you enjoyed!

Until next time,
SNU
The hunt for Yodogiri Jinnai starts. Roppi is finally allowed to roam Ikebukuro on his own after the Dollar's incident.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

"I'm going alone?"

"Not alone, per se. Kida will be with you. The two of you will follow up on some leads we had with Yodogiri. These guys have worked or been in contact with him, see if you can get any of them to tell us something we can use to find him. You'll be meeting Kida at this location in Ikebukuro." Izaya said as he passed him a piece of paper with an address written on it.

Roppi reached out and took the paper silently. He had mixed feelings about this; he was evidently nervous, a little sick in the stomach; yet he was too excited to speak, afraid that if he opened his mouth Izaya would retract his offer.

This was what he's been waiting for, the reason he came to Izaya in the first place. He was able to go outside freely without a worry of getting caught now that he could use Izaya's name as his own. He was a free man now.

It would seem that Izaya was satisfied with his performance and gave him his first solo task: track down Yodogiri Jinnai. A task he was more than happy to carry out.

"And what about you?"

Izaya sat down on his desk, "Well, since you're going out, I'll be here for the time being. I'll head out to meet my Shinjuku clients later on in the afternoon to be discreet. Just in case, I'll be texting you my location often to co-ordinate and make sure we don't run into each other. I suggest you do the same."

Roppi nodded, "Understood."

Izaya tossed something black at him, which he caught, shooting him an odd look. A wallet, he realized after a closer inspection. He opened it and found several bills inside, but no cards, nor any identification.

"An advance payment for today's work. You'll need it since you don't have a cent to your name, right?"

Roppi took in the sight of the money which he knew was no little sum, "Thank you"

His self-proclaimed boss groaned, "Stop thanking me, I'm paying you for your job you know?"

Roppi smirked, "Yeah, I know. I'll be leaving now."

Izaya shook his head and waved him off in response, "Have a safe trip"
The bell on the door chimed, signaling the arrival of customers. It was rare for someone to come this early to the bar, but not unheard of. Either way, it wasn't like business was unwelcome.

"Welcome" the barista greeted the man.

"Hello there " a black haired man replied walking in confidently, an under aged teen trailing after him.

"Sorry, we don't serve minors here." the bartender admonished giving the blond boy a stern look, which he returned with a harmless smile.

"Don't worry about him, he's just here to keep me company. We'll be gone as soon as you answer a few questions"

"What kind of questions?"

"You were a friend of Satoshi Uremeshi, correct?"

The bartender's face darkened, "Get the fuck out."

"Aww, don't be like that. We just met." The dark-haired man pouted, unperturbed by the venomous words aimed at him.

"You're Orihara Izaya," he interjected, "I've heard about you. I thought you died from that Dollars incident a while back, same time as Satoshi. And now you come snooping around here asking about him? You think I don't know you were involved with the whole thing? Don't screw with me. I don't want any part of it, so get out before I throw you out."

"Well, since you already know who I am, I guess I don't have to act like I don't know who you are, Takao-kun," the man the identified as Izaya smirked, "You say you don't want any part of it, but I know you've been looking into his death ever since you've heard about it. Odd isn't it? Strange men show up at his house, claiming that there has been an accident at the workplace that took his life. But you knew he had ties with the Awakusu-kai, you wouldn't accept that half-assed explanation from some sketchy looking guys would you? Don't you want to know what really happened to him?"

Takao gave the two customers a hard stare. Positive he shouldn't trust them, and yet the question of what really happened to his friend has been plaguing him for weeks, the informant in front of him was handing him the answers he's been looking for on a silver platter.

"I'm willing to tell you, if you're willing to cooperate with me"

The bartender raked his hands through his dark locks. This was too risky, he didn't know what kind of ordeal he was getting himself into, but knowing the informant's reputation, it couldn't be anything good.

"Like I said, I don't have anything to tell you asshole."

Though the informant was still smiling patiently, his eyes told a different story. It was like he'd rather wrap his fingers around his neck and squeeze until he hears it snap.

"That's alright, I can be patient if necessary."

As he said this, Takao could almost hear what he was thinking behind those glaring eyes. I'm not patient at all. Watch what you say, I'll kill you, trash.
"How about we talk about something else then?" Wouldn't it be faster if I cut your fingers off one by one until you're begging to tell me what I want to hear?

Takao turned from him, wiping cups as an excuse to look away, he didn't want to look at this creep's eyes anymore. It was unsettling.

"You're quite the model employee. You've been working hard, take extra shifts, staying late. That's very impressive Takao-san"

He shrugged.

"I guess it's only natural now that you're supporting Satoshi's family."

The bar master paused from his cleaning, his gaze meet Izaya's again, shocked that he knew about that.

"Didn't Satoshi have a little brother? Come to think of it, he might know a little bit more about his brother's unofficial boss. Since they're brothers right?" I wonder what method I can use to make the brat talk.

Takao growled at him, "If you lay a finger on him-"

"Eh? You think I would hurt him? How horrible, I wouldn't think about doing something like that" I'm thinking about it right now.

Bastard. That damn bastard. He wanted to stay out of this whole mess, and to keep Satoshi's family far away from the underground society as much possible after his death. But this guy looks like he would drag them all in if he didn't cooperate.

Takao clenched his fists, "What do you want to know?"

An hour later, the informant and his assistant thanked him and made showed themselves out the way they came. Before they left however, the sly-eyed informant tossed another comment over his shoulder.

"Thanks again for your help, we're closer to finding Yodogiri Jinnai, the man responsible for your friends death. The truth is he sent your friend to infiltrate the Awakusu-kai for price of paying off his debts. In the end he gave him an order that exposed him, and it got him killed. I'll be sure to pay him back for you, and for the trouble he caused me as well of course~"

Takao blinked in surprise, "...why didn't you just tell me you were looking for that guy in the first place? If he was responsible for Satoshi's death, of course I'd help you! Then why…?"

The informant smirked in response, "Why indeed?"

It dawned on him that he purposely showed him a glimpse of his ruthless side. Sure, he would have helped him if he knew he was going after the guy responsible of Satoshi's death. But he was still wary of him, Orihara Izaya sensed it too; Takao wouldn't have any qualms sharing information about Izaya's visit with the next guy who came in, nor would he bother being as co-operative the next time he walked into his bar asking for information about anything else.

But after seeing that glint in his eye, after realizing how dangerous he could be, he would dash those thoughts if they ever crossed his mind again.

And that's why Izaya did it; to keep him as an obedient puppy.
The rumours weren't exaggerating when they said that Orihara Izaya was a terrifying person.

"You're too good at this"

"Is that so? Isn't that a relief." Though, Roppi delivered the line with a complete lack of enthusiasm. The only relief he felt was due to the fact that they were done for the day, and he didn't need to speak with any more people. As he expected, smiling like Izaya was exhausting.

Kida laced his fingers behind his head as the two of them continued down the streets of Ikebukuro. "Yeah, you're a natural. Those intimidation techniques were pretty good, all those guys seemed pretty freaked out"

"They've heard of Orihara Izaya, know I have ties with the yakuza, and already believed I was dangerous. All I did was add a few well-placed glares and half-baked threats and let their minds do the rest. People see what they want to see, I just took advantage of that"

"Not bad. Have you done stuff like this before? Like extracting information from people? Going undercover as another person? Eh…hold on, you're not a cop are you? Noooo, don't arrest me officer!" he squeaked, raising both hands on mock surrender.

"Knock it off, I'm not a cop and you're making a scene."

"Haha, I'm joking you grouch. But seriously, even I haven't completely gotten the hang of all the Izaya's tricks yet, and I've been working with him on and off since I've came to Ikebukuro. This is technically your first day on the 'field', and yet you managed to wring out the information from all those guys, no problem. You must have done something like this before."

"No…though, I guess I feel like I've done this before. But I know I haven't…It's a strange feeling, it's not the first time that's happened either." Roppi remembered often in Shingen's lab he'd get twinges of nostalgia when doing something completely new.

"So weird seeing Izaya's face so troubled…it's actually kinda funny. Wait, hold that look," Kida said, whipping his phone out of his pocket to take a picture.

Roppi punched his arm, the playful teen squawked and stepped out of arms reach. "Oww! You used your full power just now didn't you?"

"Half, but I'll use full if you try to do that again."

"I don't have to do it again, it turned out pretty well" Kida grinned as he turned his phone to show the picture he took.

In the photo, Roppi had a forlorn look, his eyes clouded over and lips pressed in worry.

Roppi bristled looking at the photo, his eyes flashing dangerously. It exposed a side of him he kept to himself.

He lunged at the phone, "Kidaaa, you-!"

The boy in question cackled as he made a mad dash away from his partner, refusing to hand over his precious cellphone.

Roppi let out a slow breath, to calm himself. He didn't have to get worked up about such a little issue, he'll beat Kida into a pulp later and delete it when they weren't in public. He didn't want to
waste his precious 'outdoor time' chasing that little buffoon.

He turned and walked off alone. The two of them were done their work, they could go off on their own if they wanted to, right?

"Izaya-san!" a voice called out from the crowd of crossing pedestrians.

Roppi paused, and spotted a boy wearing a blue school uniform waving and approaching him. He recognized him from the fight with the yakuza, he's the one who shouted a warning when that guy pointed the gun at their group.

He later learned that this kid had a lot of other stuff going on with him too; he went by the online chat handle Tanaka Taro on the chat Roppi and Izaya frequented, not to mention that this kid was also was one of the co-founders and current admin of the online Dollars group. All that wrapped up in a neat package of a quiet model student. Ryuugamine Mikado, his boyish features did a good job hiding what a terrifyingly powerful kid he was. Roppi didn't like that deceiving kind of personality at all.

"Mikado-kun, it's been a while. How's it going?"

"I've been well, and yourself? How are your injuries?"

"They've fully healed already." Roppi shrugged, he took the boy's current attire into consideration, "Looks like your back in school, how is it?"

It felt weird talking with this boy as if he's known him. Yes, he knew all about him, but this was the first time they've ever spoken, acting like he knew him was strange.

"I um… about that Izaya-san, I wanted to ask, have you heard from Masomi? He hasn't come back to school still."

"Kida? Yeah, I was with him earlier."

"EH? He's here? In Ikebukuro? Please tell me where he is!"

"Uh…"

Over Mikado's shoulder he spotted a wide eyed Kida stop in his tracks a few paces away. It seems that he realized he wasn't being chased and sheepishly made his way back to Roppi.

He saw the two of them and froze. Kida crossed both his arms in front of him in the shape of a big 'X', shaking his head furiously as a silent plea.

Roppi blinked. Was he not supposed to say that?

Mikado noticed Roppi staring at something behind him and made a move to turn around. Roppi quickly grabbed his chin and forced him to look at him again. Mikado's startled eyes met his again as Kida took the opportunity to hightail it out of there.

"Ahaha! Too bad Mikado-kun, but Kida-kun has already left town on another job for me, there's no telling when he'll be back. But I'll let him know you asked."

Mikado looked disappointed, "Ah, is that so?"

Roppi let go of his chin and stole a quick glance over his shoulder to make sure Kida wasn't in sight.
Mikado followed his gaze as well, curious to what he'd been looking at since earlier.

Out of pure dumb luck, Kadota happened to be walking toward them from the same direction. He raised his hand in greeting, "Yo, you two. How's it going?"

"Good afternoon, Kadota-san"

"Long time no see, Dota-chin."

"I told you not to call me that" Kadota huffed, "Anyway, how are you doing? The last I saw you, you had two bullet holes in your chest, then you fell off the face of the earth."

Roppi shrugged as he shoved his hands in his pockets, "I've been keeping a low profile."

"No kidding. Disappearing like that after getting shot, it's no wonder Dollars was littered with rumours that you were dead. Good thing I checked with Shinra for the truth, or I would have started believing it."

"Heh…what a doting friend." Roppi was starting to get bored, he wasn't able to muster any enthusiasm anymore, he wanted the conversation to end so he could get away from people, have some peace and quiet, and maybe a nice meal.

Kadota raised an eyebrow, "Is something wrong?"

Shit…couldn't he let his guard down for one second?

"What do you mean Dota-chin? Nothing's wrong!" he insisted, forcing his lips into the smile he's been putting on all day.

He must have done a horrible job, because Kadota's frown deepened, "You're acting strange."

Roppi was at a loss at what to do. Giving up the act wasn't an option.

Kadota surveyed Roppi's nervous face, "You're still not over getting shot after all, huh? I figured that you'd be shaken up about it."

Deciding to use that as leverage, Roppi put on another smirk, "Oh? What's this? Dota-chin is worried about me? Oh my, what should I do? I don't know how to accept these feelings!"

Kadota cringed (Roppi was sure he was cringing the same way on the inside) and denied his accusation, "I'm not! I'm just concerned. And now I'm wondering why I even bothered."

"Ahaha, so sweet of you. But you don't need to worry about me, I'm fine," he dropped his voice to a whisper only Kadota could hear, "And if I weren't, then that's my problem, I'll deal with it on my own." He gave Kadota a look that clearly said 'drop it'. It was how Izaya said their relationship was; they don't involve in each other's affairs if the other doesn't want them to.

Kadota gave him a searching look, then nodded, "Alright then."

Suspicions avoided.

"Thanks for understa-oomph!" Roppi was caught by surprise when a flying mailbox slammed into his side and sent him stumbling. He caught himself before he fell unceremoniously on his ass.

Kadota and Mikado's thoughts of 'oh shit' were clear on their faces, as they turned to the direction the mailbox came from.
"IZAYAAAAAAA! What the HELL did I say about coming back to Ikebukuro, HUH?!

'I knew it. I knew it. I knew it, I fucking knew it!' Shizuo repeated in head as he stalked closer to that lying, betraying, manipulative louse.

There that bastard was, as smug as always, toying which some kid and Kadota, laughing and smirking like the way he always did. Nothing had changed, he was the same old stinking flea.

He found himself smirking too, because it was all so damn funny. How he was almost convinced that Izaya would keep his word for once, or how he thought Izaya might have changed for the better. But looking at him now, messing with people like he typically did, he knew nothing had changed at all.

Roppi froze as he spotted the infamous beast in a bartender suit prowled closer to the group.

*Intimidating.* That's the only word that came to mind as the walking powerhouse came closer, smiling like he just heard a funny joke. *So very intimidating.*

"I'm an idiot for believing that you'd actually stick to your word flea. I outta snap both of your legs and throw you out of Ikebukuro for real this time. Hell, why don't I snap your neck while I'm at it?"

Roppi cursed Izaya for not giving him more instruction on how to deal with Shizuo other than just *don't* deal with him. How was he supposed to do that when he was standing right there?

Well...he supposed that left him with only one option. He pushed himself to his feet, and calmly brushed imaginary dust off his person.

"Gottagobye" he said in a rush as he spun on his heel and fled, leaving a startled Kadota and Mikado behind.

"Come back here bastard!" Shizuo barked as he tore after him.

Hearing the irate blond hot on his heels only served to make Roppi run faster.

And the usual chase began between a different pair of people.

Shizuo grabbed whatever his arm was able to reach as he chased after the Izaya-lookalike down the street.

*'This is kind of like that projectile simulation Shingen put me through' Roppi thought, finding it amusing to compare a man to a canon. Street signs, bicycles, and poles whizzed by nearly grazing him as he dodged. The larger ones were harder to avoid, like the takoyaki stand came crashing in front him and he was forced hop through it.*

Roppi thought he was a little crazy for actually enjoying this. He was forced to think on his feet; he could feel his blood pumping as the chase forced him to stay alert or die trying. It was different from the simulations because this was real, this was another monster like him and he could escape as long as he could outlast him. It was like a game of endurance.

He urged his legs to pick up speed, in hopes to lose the wrathful beast behind him. But regardless of his efforts, he could hear the string of curses and swears behind him getting closer and closer by the second.

He didn't get very far before he felt a choking tug on his hood and his feet was swept out from under...
him.

He suddenly felt disoriented and weightless, but it only lasted a second before he realized that he was thrown several feet into the air. He painfully collided with a billboard and fell down to the railing of the structure, luckily managing to land in a crouch somehow. He gasped in pain, clinging on to the bars for support.

"Get your ass down here you piece of rat shit!" he heard Shizuo shout as he stomped over to the column of the billboard.

"You threw me up here in the first place!" he shouted back hysterically before he could stop himself.

"SHUT UP AND DIE!" he roared as he hugged the base of the billboard and started to pull. Roppi watched in fascination and horror as the screws securing the large structure to the ground popped out and the support began bending to Shizuo's hold.

"You've got to be kidding me…" Roppi muttered as he tightened his grip on the railing. Heiwajima Shizuo never failed to blow him away with his unstoppable strength. The game of endurance became a lot less appealing at the sight of Shizuo's insane strength.

With a final yell, Shizuo lifted the entire billboard off the ground and let it fall. Not wanting to be under the structure when it landed, Roppi jumped at the first chance he saw for a safe landing.

As the billboard crashed, Roppi managed to land in a dumpster which cushioned his fall. He gagged at the overwhelming stink he was suddenly surrounded with, but he was thankful that there was nothing particularly sticky or slimy there from what he could tell, just a very mouldy mattress. He struggled to right himself before Shizuo cornered him again.

"Well looks like you found a place where you belong, trash."

Roppi cursed and swung himself over the side, what he wasn't expecting was his foot connecting to something halfway.

The colour in his face drained as he realized that he just accidentally killed Shizuo in the face.

He retracted his foot slowly, his eyes wide as he stuttered out, "I-I…uh…no…th-that was…I didn't m-mean to…"

Shizuo's glare intensified with every word that stumbled out of his mouth.

Fuck, he was so screwed.

He sprang out of the other side of dumpster to put as much distance between himself and Shizuo before he snapped. Which was a wisely-timed decision.

"IIEEE-Za-YAAAAAABBBBBBBBBAAA!"

The poor raven ran as quickly as he could down the alley, trying his hardest to think of some way to get out of this situation. Unfortunately he came up with a dead end.

Literally.

A brick wall defiantly blocked his path as if sealing off his inevitable fate. It was like the world was against him today. He stopped just before it, breathing harshly. He heard clacking of footsteps behind him come to a stop as well, as well as a triumphant chuckle.
"Prepare yourself Izaya, I won't be going easy on you."

Roppi swallowed, trying to even his breathing as he slowly turned to face the man behind him, "Heiwajima-san…"

"Don't you fucking 'Heiwajima-san' me, that shit ain't gonna work this time!"

"Please forgive me. I needed to meet with some people…"

"I don't give a shit about your excuses or your dirty work either, just take some FUCKING RESPONSIBILITY!" Shizuo yelled as he swung his fist at him.

Roppi dodged his fist and tried reasoning with him again, "Responsibility for what?"

"How about your promise to stay out of 'Bukuro for starters?" Two more furious swinging fists.

"Like I said, I had work to do, I can't avoid that! Besides, I apologized, isn't that taking responsibility?" A turn and a sidestep.

"Again with the excuses, you're just dodging the problem!" Shizuo growled.

The raven realized something, he was dodging. Isn't there an easier way out of this?

The next swing came at him, and Roppi stood there, gut clenchd, hands at his side. Shizuo saw that he wasn't going to avoid him and faltered. It was too late to stop the punch, but it had less power than before. The raven flew back and hit the wall upon impact, even though it wasn't a hundred percent of his power, it still hurt like hell. Still, he was built to take heavy hits, he wasn't too worried.

"You're right, Heiwajima-san" he gasped, "I'm dodging the problem. You're angry because I broke my promise to you, and that's my fault, I'm sorry for that. So punish me if it will make you feel better"

Pain was something he was used to, and if it would help him get on better terms with Shizuo, he would welcome the pain like an old friend.

Shizuo studied his face for a moment. He was doing that thing again. Shizuo knew long ago that he should trust his gut instinct. Up until now, it's been telling him that Izaya wasn't someone he should trust. But now, that very instinct told him that something was wrong about punching the man in front of him.

'Aaarghh! Punch first, think later!'

Shizuo had just about enough of this roundabout thinking that Izaya has been causing him the past month or so. Whether or not Izaya was a changed man or not, whether Izaya was a good guy or not, he should pay for making him like this at least!

Shizuo's fist sunk into Roppi's gut, sending the man doubling over, gasping for air.

"Don't make promises you can't keep louse. A real man sticks by his word." He grabbed the front of his coat and pulled him up, forcing him to look him in the eye, "Got that?"

The shorter male coughed as he struggled regain his breath, and returned Shizuo's gaze.

Shizuo smirked in satisfaction. Oh, he was going to enjoy making him pay.
Orihara Izaya, reborn!

Tsukumoya Shinichi: Oh, he lives.

Orihara Izaya: Save it. I know you knew.

Tsukumoya Shinichi: That's funny, because I didn't know that you knew that I knew!

Orihara Izaya: I'm not going to waste time with small talk. What do you know about Yodogiri Jinnai?

Tsukumoya Shinichi: That's a very vague question. I know everything after all. And unless you want to clean out your bank account learning everything about that guy, then you should probably be more specific.

Orihara Izaya: I'm talking about the recent incident with Awakusu-kai. I know he hasn't approached any other factions with his information. But has he gone to anyone else?

Tsukumoya Shinichi: No, he hasn't approached anyone with that information yet. But I can say that he has been looking in the direction of the Asuki group a lot lately.

Orihara Izaya: Asuki huh?

Tsukumoya Shinichi: Speaking of which, what is the weapon exactly? You can tell me right? I'll give you a discount if you do.

Orihara Izaya: Sorry~ I've been paid to keep that information to myself

Tsukumoya Shinichi: …That pause before you answered was too long. You were laughing at me weren't you? So mean.

Orihara Izaya: No, just surprised that you didn't know. You did say you knew everything right?

Tsukumoya Shinichi: You're definitely laughing now, aren't you?

Orihara Izaya: So, where is Yodogiri Jinnai now?

Tsukumoya Shinichi: Technically he's in Osaka. But he's in Ikebukuro. And a little bit in Shinjuku.

Orihara Izaya: Are you just screwing with me?

Tsukumoya Shinichi: If you want me to answer that, I'm going to have to bill you~

Tsukumoya Shinichi: But I think you should focusing on asking the right questions instead.

Orihara Izaya: What the hell does that mean…he has more than one base of operations?

Tsukumoya Shinichi: Hmmm, I guess you can say that. It should be a given, when you take his goal into consideration.

Orihara Izaya: Is that so… you know what that goal is?

Tsukumoya Shinichi: Now you're asking the right questions!

Tsukumoya Shinichi: It's quiet pretentious of him really, but Yodogiri Jinnai wants immortality. He thinks he can obtain it.
Orihara Izaya: …

Tsukumoya Shinichi: Oh…has Izaya received a big shock?

Orihara Izaya: No, I figured it might be something like that. It might be a little easier to corner him then I thought.

Tsukumoya Shinichi: It wouldn't do you much good to challenge that guy so openly. He's more dangerous than you think. Your shadow warrior seems to be up to the task though.

Orihara Izaya: I applaud your skill and gull to bug my apartment.

Tsukumoya Shinichi: Eh? So rude, I wouldn't do such thing, or would I? Hahaha.

Tsukumoya Shinichi: Either way, I'm just saying I'd be careful if I were you. The name Yodogiri has a lot of power and resources behind it, it's not wise to be careless around that kind of a threat. You and your shadow better watch yourselves. That guy may have already slipped under your radar somehow, and begun messing with your plans. Just a friendly warning, from one observer to another.

Orihara Izaya: Whatever, I got what I came for. I'll transfer the money, I'm adding more to the sum for you to keep my 'shadow' a secret. But know this, the minute I find out who you are, I'll kill you.

_Orihara Izaya, confirmed dead._

Tsukumoya Shinichi: Your death threats are getting less and less creative. Does this mean you're getting bored of me? That won't do, I should find different ways to annoy you if that's the case.

Tsukumoya Shinichi: And I already told you if you found out who I was the shock would kill you~ hahahahahahahahahahahahahahahahahahahahahahahahahahahahahaha!

Tsukumoya Shinichi: Ahhhh~ I'm so bored.

‘How did this happen?’ Roppi thought wearily as he re-evaluated the current situation.

Not even half an hour ago, Heiwajima Shizuo was in the middle of beating the crap out of him, yet here they were in a parfait shop, a waitress placing their orders on the table.

"Heiwajima-san…why are we here?"

"Huh? I told you, I'm hungry. Also, I haven't forgiven you yet, so you're paying." Shizuo said as if it was the most simplest thing in the world.

"…what happened to beating me up?"

The blond took a big scoop of ice cream and stuffed it in his mouth, "I took out most of my anger with that first punch. The other two were for good measure. I didn't want to let you off easy so you're going to pay with your wallet. Now stop asking questions, you're making the parfait taste bad."

Roppi blinked slowly. Was this normal? Were Izaya and Shizuo really enemies? Is this a regular occurrence? Shizuo sure acted like it was. But nothing he learned so far led him to believe that Shizuo and Izaya were friends.

He didn't even know how to handle this messed up situation. He vehemently cursed Izaya for not telling him anything about the two of them.
Well, he might as well play along.

Roppi propped his cheek onto his hand and stared at the enigma sitting across from him. There was so much he wanted to learn about him. What's the biggest thing he's lifted? How many fights did he actually use his full strength in? Why does he wear a bartender uniform? Does he make up attack names for his punches? What's his pain tolerance?

He should use this golden opportunity to learn as much as he can about his 'idol'. In this kind of situation, it was okay to act a little more familiar with each other right…?

Roppi hesitantly reached out, Shizuo's eyes followed the appendage suspiciously, "What are you…"

"Does this hurt?" Roppi asked as he pinched the top of Shizuo's hand that was resting on the table.

A vein on Shizuo's temple throbbed in irritation, "Yes"

Roppi's eyebrows rose in clear surprise and a little embarrassment as he retracted his hand quickly, wondering why he thought it was appropriate to pinch him, "Um…sorry. I didn't think it would"

"It didn't," Shizuo said, "But it was annoying, so if you don't want me to throw you out the window, then don't do it again"

Roppi blinked before his lips quirked upwards in amusement, "You're surprisingly kind."

Shizuo gave him a weird look, "…huh?"

"You gave me a warning, instead of throwing me without a second thought. Come to think of it, when you were fighting with those thugs in the alley, you had the decency to warn them before fighting them. Despite what people say about you, you're well mannered. What kind of monster has manners?"

Something had come over Izaya, Shizuo was sure of it. Was he sick? Delirious? There was no way the Izaya he knew would bluntly compliment him like that. When had he ever called him anything other than a monster?

Shizuo stared, really stared at his so-called enemy. He noticed everything seemed different somehow. Even his movements were different; as if they all weren't designed to piss him off like they usually did.

Every little thing Izaya did annoyed him, from the way he would talk to the way he carried himself. And now, they suddenly weren't. They weren't any different from before, so why?

"Did you mean those things you said?"

Roppi tilted his head slightly trying to recall what Shizuo was referring to, "What things?"

"After you were shot, you said stuff like 'I knew you were a nice guy', and 'I'm glad I met you'"

Roppi's face turned beet red. Had he really said those things? He must have been delirious from the blood loss. "I don't remember saying that…"

"Well you did. Answer my question, were you telling the truth?"

To lie or not to lie. That was the question. Lying wasn't going to help him in this situation was it? He didn't want to risk angering the man at all.
"...yes. I know you're not a bad person. And I guess meeting you was a good thing for me, even though all we do is fight..." He wasn't going to mention that he only fought him once (twice if you were willing to count the time they met), and he sort of liked it. But the feeling felt out of place to him, as if it was a feeling that was nurtured outside of his own subconscious. If he were to put the feeling into simple words; it was like it wasn't his own thoughts at all, yet they were in his head for some reason. He didn't like the idea of easily accepting a thought like that as his own.

"I feel that Heiwajima-san is similar to me in a way...that's why I'm glad." he muttered. He didn't know if this was true for Izaya, so it's technically a lie, but he knew he had a better chance making Shizuo believe how he felt, rather than making up something on the spot about how he thought Izaya felt.

"I see," Shizuo sat quietly pulling out the Pocky used to decorate his parfait and began to nibble it slowly as he considered Roppi's answer. "...you still owe me three more favours."

"...Eh?"

"Once for sparing you that time in the alley, another for fighting those yakuza for you, and again for giving Shinra my blood so you wouldn't die."

"You...you gave your blood for me?"

Shizuo's eyes widened and he clamped his mouth shut, he fixed his gaze on the dessert in front of him. It might be a trick of the light, but it looked like there was more color on his cheeks, "Um... yeah, well er...ugh, shut the hell up! The point is you owe me!"

Thump

Roppi and Shizuo glanced up at each other questioningly upon hearing the sound. They confirmed that neither of them were the source, and simultaneously they brought their attention to the glass window beside them.

Erika stood there, with her face pressed against the glass, leering at the two of them. Her eyes were sparkling in wonder and joy. Her excited voice was muttering something over and over again, but it was too muffled to make out. Were those tears in her eyes?

Walker quickly appeared at her side and pulled her away with much difficulty, he bowed to them apologetically as he escorted her away.

The two were silent as they watched the otaku duo leave.

"Is...she alright?" Roppi asked.

"Who knows" Shizuo shrugged before digging back into his parfait.

"No, I haven't heard from Roppi-kun since then. That boy hasn't tired contacting me at all since he left. Not even once!"

"Natural occurrence. I shall recite famous Japanese proverb: Regardless presence or absence of parents, children collapse."

"It's 'children grow' isn't it? I know he's growing up, and he doesn't necessarily need me for that. But it still feels like I lost him to that sneak."
"Regret pierces my being greatly for reminding you of woe, with respect. Shall I atone with the act of seppuku?"

"Of course not, Emilia. What would I do if I lost you as well?" Shingen chuckled humorously.

After Roppi's abrupt departure, Shingen went on to find his own apartment since Shinra was serious about kicking him out. He moved into a nicely sized apartment in Ikebukuro a week later. For the past month he has been coordinating with a few contacts to track Hijiribe Ruri. Now that Roppi was gone, he could focus on the assignment that bought him to this city in the first place.

Shingen adjusted his hold on his cellphone before he unlocked and opened his apartment door with his free hand, "So, when are you planning on coming to Ikebukuro?"

"Plans have been made. Plans have been executed."

Shingen stilled, Emilia's voice came from both the phone and the living room in front of him. He blinked incredulously at his wife who happily sat on his couch, waving at him.

"Surprise, welcome home, I'm home! The order of which I am not sure to say. Apologies, apologies."

Shingen laughed strode over to her and Emilia jumped off the couch, they both caught each other in a deep embrace.

"How did you get in here my dear?"

"Polite landlord. Much skepticism of our marriage, picture proof required. Polite, rude landlord."

"Ahaha, is that so? I'll have a word with him if it bothers you that much. I see you brought everything…and then some" he said surveying the large quantity of suitcases littering the room.

Emilia giggled, "Ufufu…and then some, yes. Would you like to see something of interest?"

"I'm back" Izaya called out.

"Welcome home" Roppi replied.

The informant's mood lifted, he rather enjoyed having someone greet him as he came home. Not that he'd say it out loud. Namie was hardly there when he'd come home at this hour; and even if she was, she'd be too irritated to greet him properly.

A snappish 'What took you so long? I need to go home already' was the usual welcome he got.

He walked into the living room and spotted Namie was sitting on the couch, her hands busy putting tabs and marking notes on papers, and as expected, she barely acknowledged his presence. Roppi sat on the leather chair and he looked upset for some reason (well, more than usual), with his arms crossed and frown in place.

"Uh oh. Why the long face? Was I supposed to get the groceries while I was out? Did you want me to pick up Kani Pan from the convenient store?"

Roppi said nothing.

"Aw, don't be like that. What happened? Something went wrong with the meetings? I heard it went well, Kida said you were rather good."
"The meetings went fine. My problem is what happened afterwards."

"Oh?"

"I ran into Heiwajima Shizuo."

"Did you now?" Izaya's face went blank at the mention of his long-time foe, not giving away how he felt about that piece of information. "Well, no major damage I see. Isn't that great?"

"Look, I know you hate talking about him, but I need to know a little more information about the two of you if I'm going to convince people that I'm Orihara Izaya."

"He hates talking about him? You're kidding right? It's the complete opposite." Namie cut in as she started clearing out her work and packing up.

"Namie..." Izaya warned.

"Am I wrong? Talking about Heiwajima Shizuo is one of your favourite hobbies right? You never shut up about him." She raised her eyebrow at her boss, challenging him to contradict her. She could count off the number of times that he brought up Shizuo unprovoked in the past week with both her hands and feet, and those were only the times she actually bothered to listen.

Izaya sent her a withering glare then pinched the bridge of his nose. Namie looked between him and Roppi, who sat there looking confused, and picked up on the sudden tension that sprung up. She sighed, it seemed like conflict between the two of them was starting to become a regular thing now. Whatever Izaya fooled him to believe or whatever Roppi wanted answers for, they could talk it out on their own, she didn't want to stick around and watch the drama unfold.

"It seems that you two need to straighten some things out. I'll be going then." She passed the file she'd been compiling to Izaya, "Here. This is what we know so far about Yodogiri. It has everything Roppi and Kida collected today as well."

Izaya and Roppi didn't glance her way as she picked up her bag and left them alone in the apartment.

"Never shut up about him, huh?" Roppi questioned after an extended period of silence.

"She was just exaggerating."

"Namie-san isn't really the exaggerating type. You would have called her out on it on the spot if she did. But you didn't."

"Just drop it already, it has nothing to do with you anyway."

"You tell me every life story of all the boring humans in Ikebukuro, but the one person I want to know most about, you clam up?"

Izaya's eyes bore into Roppi's. "I don't trust you with that information"

Roppi clenched his jaw, he didn't want to get in an argument, but Izaya was really pissing him off now. He spoke as calmly as he could muster, "You let me sleep in the same apartment as you, yet information about Heiwajima Shizuo is something you can't trust me with? If you still have a problem with me-"

"It's not that I dislike you or anything, it's that I don't trust you. Completely different."

The introverted boy's forehead creased in confusion. He liked him, but he didn't trust him.
It was one of those confusing human things wasn't it? He'd seen this before (now that he thought about it, the girls from the square, it was similar to this isn't it?), Izaya had said that confusing relationships like those are actually simple; there are just factors that you don't see at first glance that cause people to act out of the ordinary. A human's behaviour becomes very simple after you factor those points in.

'Fine, I can figure Izaya out later, but for now...' Roppi shrugged, "Well after today, I really need to know a little more about Shizuo. We might be seeing him a lot more than usual, and I don't want to be caught not knowing something I should know."

Izaya's brow rose questioningly, "What's that supposed to mean?"

"Today I treated Heiwajima-san to a parfait. We talked a lot, it was kind of fun, and I'm sure we'll be doing something similar again. I was lucky he didn't notice anything though."

A stunned silence followed Roppi's declaration, Izaya's pale face looked even paler. Then came an indignant splutter, "Wha-you-how-WHAT?!"

And as quickly as the blood drained from his face, it came rushing back and painted his face an impressive shade of red, "Who the hell said you can DATE Shizu-chan with my face you brat?"

"...that qualifies as a date?"

Izaya didn't dignify that question with an answer, he simply strode over placed his hands on the desk and gave his roommate a no-nonsense stare, "Explain. What happened All of it. Right now."

Roppi retold a brief summary of everything that happened after he and Kida finished their job. How he ran into Mikado and Kadota, and shortly after, Shizuo. He told him that he was chased, then caught, beat up briefly, then they went to get dessert.

Izaya's eyebrow twitched. He wasn't satisfied with that explanation, so he told Roppi to retell everything again, but with as much detail as possible.

"...and then he claimed that I owed him three more favours from last month's Dollars incident. For saving me, for fighting with me, and donating his blood so I wouldn't die."

Izaya was quiet, then, "Anything else?"

"No, we continued eating, Karisawa walked by, she looked happy to see us, but that's it."

Izaya scoffed. "Well in any case, I'm starting to understand why Shizuo acts different around you. Your behaviour around him is the polar opposite to how I would act around him"

Roppi shot him an annoyed look, "And that's why I'm telling you to tell me more about how you act around him! I've been lucky so far, but what happens when I say or do something completely out of character?"

"You have been doing things completely out of character, idiot. 'Heiwajima-san'? Really?"

A growl, "He was pissed and I was trying to be polite."

"Polite? Have you not learned any-" Izaya groaned, "I'm tired of this. We'll talk in the morning. Tch, ridiculous, a date with Shizu-chan...seriously"

"It wasn't a date" Roppi indignantly called after him as Izaya went upstairs. Roppi wasn't sure, but he
had an idea of what the cause was for Izaya's strange behaviour.

_Vrrrm._

He pulled out his phone as he felt it vibrate with a new notification.

**New chat contact: Shitei-ken [Accept/Block?]**

_'Who?_'

Usually he would block weird chat requests (all of requests, actually) without a second thought. But Izaya had told him that valuable information came from the most unlikely sources, so he should never cut anyone off. So he reluctantly accepted the request, hoping that no trouble would come of it.

Unfortunately for him, trouble was all he would get from this new contact.

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**Chapter End Notes**

[Author's Notes] That damn chat name, I've changed it like 14 times.

On another note, I did some research on Yodogiri Jinnai and realized his case is a very complicated one, and I don't think it would mesh well with my current plot. So I made the decision to not have a fully cannon Yodogiri. I will get as close to cannon as I can, but facts will be heavily bent for the sake of plot progression and I don't want to spoil the DRRR! Novels for those who want to read them when they are fully translated. I wasn't planning on following the events of the novels completely anyway (overlaps, but no exact repeats, since adding Roppi changes the game, dunnit?), but I've tried to keep all the characters as "cannon" as possible, so I'm a little bummed that the main antagonist needs to be an exception.

**Glossary**

_Takoyaki_: a ball-shaped Japanese snack typically filled with minced or diced octopus

_Seppuku_: Ritual suicide by disembowelment formerly practiced by Japanese samurai

_Kani Pan_: Crab shaped sweat bread.

Emilia is quoting a Japanese proverb: Children grow up, with or without parents (Kodomo-tachi wa ryōshin no umu ni kakawarazu, sodatsu). She messed up the last part and says kiyōdatsu instead (Children fall).

I can confirm at this point that there will be yaoi in this story (MxM, sex scenes, etc). Appropriate warnings will be at the top for every chapter with lemon scenes.

(Likenextchapter)

Huh, what? Who said that?
Are You Hunting or Being Hunted?

Chapter Summary

(Sexual Themes in this Chapter, lemon scene begins and ends with "***") Izaya and Roppi work to find a lead to tracking down Yodogiri, and they make some progress. Izaya makes some progress of his own with Shizuo

***

He didn't know what was harder, the wall against his back, or the body pushing him into it.

"Ngh…Shizuo!"

A greedy mouth attacked his neck while rough hands roamed his sides, not particularly searching for anything, just content on touching.

Izaya let out a groan when a wayward thumb brushed under his waistband, caressing his hipbone, a little too close to where he really wanted to be touched.

He felt Shizuo's lips pull into a grin, "You want something? I-za-ya-kun?"

"Stop talking ahh…you're mmm, ruining the mood."

"Sorry, I didn't hear you. Did you say you want me to stop?" Shizuo asked pulling back with a cocky smirk. That jerk knew fully well he said nothing of the sort.

Izaya growled. He yanked Shizuo back down into a bruising kiss. It was deep, sensual, needy, only parting to breathe. Izaya mumbled in between pecks, "Asshole…just…touch…me"

Shizuo chuckled as his hands brushed over Izaya's clothed arousal, giving it a firm squeeze. The raven groaned and pressed back into the touch.

It seemed that Shizuo became impatient himself to continue teasing, and pushed Izaya's pants and boxers down low, the loosened material fell off easily. Izaya lifted a leg, Shizuo grasped it and secured it around his waist.

Shizuo wrapped a strong hand around Izaya's member, griping him roughly, earning a choked gasp from the shorter male. He stroked him with measured movements, his fist jerking up and down along his length.

Izaya shuddered with pleasure and his hips bucked in time with Shizuo's hand. All his senses were dulled, like he was drugged or something similar. It made him doubt whether this was actually happening or not.

But he didn't care, all he knew was everything felt good.

He could feel the heat coiling up in his abdomen, his body tingling and humming with desire. His face heated up as he felt his own arousal throb in Shizuo's hand. His eyes fluttered closed as his lips parted, letting out small whimpers and whines.
Shizuo's heated eyes drank in the sight as he licked the fingers of his free hand.

"You have no idea how good you look right now. It makes me want to mess you up."

The smaller man wanted to shoot back a coy reply, but his words drowned into a moan when a slick finger probed his entrance. The digit worked into him slowly stretching him out, pressing in and pulling out, intimately caressing his insides. Another finger joined the first as he felt himself relax to the protrusion. The two fingers scissored into him stretching, curling, pressing, making Izaya toss his head back and moan helplessly.

"Ah, aah, Shizu-oohh…"

"Fuck…” Shizuo groaned when he heard him call him name in such a wanton voice.

He retracted his fingers and hastily unbuttoned his own trousers. Izaya eagerly helped him push them down revealing his own hardened erection. Shizuo cupped Izaya's backside and lifted him up, aligning himself with his entrance.

Both men's breathing became harsh and laboured and Shizuo slowly and steadily pressed into Izaya's tight heat. He eased in, painfully stretching Izaya, filling him to the brim with his length. The pain was muted, suspiciously so. Yet Izaya didn't dwell, he feared it would all stop if he did. After a pause to collect his breath, Shizuo started to thrust shallowly. He rolled his hips with controlled yet powerful thrusts making Izaya want to cry out. He was going too damned slow, it was driving him insane.

Izaya did cry out when he felt Shizuo hit that sweet spot inside him. The informant forgot whatever protests he had before, he could go at whatever pace he wanted as long as he kept hitting that spot.

Raw desire clawed from within him, as if trying to escape and consume the man in his arms. Izaya possessively wrapped his legs around his waist as he continued to drive into him.

"L-Look at me Shizu-chan…only me." Izaya wasn't sure why he whispered such a thing, but he felt he needed to say it.

Shizuo's amber eyes locked with his, surprisingly tender for a fleeting moment, a look he would never give him in reality. He picked up the pace, searing hot friction making the two of them cry out in pleasure. Izaya could feel his climax approaching, his muscles clenched down as Shizuo continued to plow into him at a frantic pace.

The last thing to tumble out of his lips as he came was his name.

"Shizuo!"

***

'That dream again…'

Izaya groggily slid his eyelids open, they felt understandably heavier than usual as they blinked away the sting from the late morning light. His body was sweaty and exhausted. He lifted the sheets that covered his body and saw the mess he made. He groaned and let his head fall back onto his pillow.

A dream like that wasn't uncommon for him, in fact they came to him at the most unwelcome of
times. He felt as if his subconscious was mocking him, showing him how willingly he would succumb to that brute in those dreams, how he would reciprocate, and how he would *enjoy* it no matter how much he denied it. These dreams have been happening more often as of late he noticed; ever since the Dollars/Awakusu incident a while back.

'Aah, I really don't want to get up in this state.'

But he did anyway. He needed to clean his sheets and get ready, and he was already late for breakfast. Now that he had a roommate, he needed to be extra careful about these things. Izaya would rather die than let Roppi catch wind about these dreams he had. He didn't want *anyone* getting the wrong idea about this. He knew where he stood in terms of Shizuo, and Shizuo has made it very clear of where he stood in terms of him. There was nothing in between the lines. And that was the end of that.

'Was it though?'

Pointedly ignoring his own thoughts, Izaya rolled out of bed, pulling the sheets out as he went. He shoved them in his laundry bin, leaving it to deal with when he was sure nobody else was home. When he opened the door to leave the bin out of the room, he froze.

Roppi stood outside, his hand raised, poised to knock.

Izaya paled, he didn't realize his roommate was already awake, "...how long have you been standing there?"

"Just got here. You overslept and it's your turn to go out first," he answered looking slightly annoyed, "We're supposed to leave two hours apart right? I'll be late for my appointments if you hold me up."

...It was entirely possible that he didn't hear him calling out Shizuo's name in his sleep, or maybe he didn't say anything out loud this time.

Or, his twin was being polite and wasn't going to comment on catching him red-handed, moaning his enemy's name in bed.

Izaya was sincerely hoping that the former was the case.

Roppi raised an eyebrow, "Something wrong?"

"No, it's nothing. I'll get ready and meet you downstairs"

"Alright," he shrugged, his face impassive as ever as he headed to the stairs.

The informant closed the door after making sure his twin left the second floor, and let his head hit the hard wood with a dull thunk.

This was going to be a long day.

This new contact of his was strange. He chatted with him for a good portion of the night, and yet he couldn't get a good picture of who he was. Of course, the guy was reluctant to answer him when he asked more personal questions, but he offered to tell him after they got to know each other a little better.

A usual reaction for anyone being asked personal questions online.
But the only unusual thing was Roppi felt completely different with him compared to all the other contacts he's spoken with. He was polite, a good listener, sharp and seemed genuinely interested in just talking about everything yet absolutely nothing with 'Hachimen'. Talking for the sake of talking. It probably sounded dull, but it was refreshing after sitting through conversations of useless gossip or people complaining about their lives. 'Shitei-ken' always seemed to find a topic that Hachimen didn't mind talking about. They chatted and bantered a bit and had a few laughs too. It was surprisingly enjoyable.

He offered to add him to the chat group with the others, since he felt he would fit well with them, but 'Shitei-ken' declined. Roppi wondered if it was strange to warm up to a human this quickly, but he fell to his usual excuse that this was a casual online chat; they knew little about each other, and there was nothing personal affiliation attached.

Roppi was cautious nonetheless. The fact that he had no idea who he was talking to was unsettling. And he learned well from opening up to 'Kanra' too easily. It was also unsettling how Shitei-ken seemed to know him well already only after speaking with him a few times. The cautious route was the smarter option he concluded.

This is why when he decided to talk to him about his current dilemma, he avoided the details and twisted a lot of the facts.

He had a feeling that Izaya was jealous of Roppi's ability to interact with Shizuo so easily, that's what he understood from the way he kept asking how he was able to do it. Roppi thought it was because he had hoped to do something similar himself, but was never able to pull it off. But now, he had a completely different explanation. He just needed a second opinion.

CHATROOM

Hachimen: Say, Shitei ken-san. Do you know what love looks like?

Shitei-ken: Love? I'm not too sure. Why do you ask?

Shitei-ken: Could it be that Hachimen-san in love?

Hachimen: I didn't say that moron. It's a friend of mine. I have the feeling he might be. I don't know what the signs are, so I can't tell.

Shitei-ken: Love, huh? Um, I guess I know a little bit about that…I guess he'd get nervous around the person he likes, they get distracted a lot or they're always lost in thought?

Hachimen:…he doesn't act like that at all.

Shitei-ken: Oh…how is he acting?

Hachimen: Angry, quiet, frustrated, and secretive. I don't know…but I still get the feeling he is. And it's irritating because he's taking out his anger on me. It's annoying.

Shitei-ken: Haha, fight Hachimen-san! You'll understand him eventually. You're friends right?

Hachimen: Yeah…

Hachimen: I need to log off now, I'll talk to you later
He logged off as soon as he heard footsteps signalling that Izaya finally made his way downstairs. Fully dressed, and ready to go.

"Well it's about time" Roppi said as he approached. "Hurry up and leave, I need to head out soon as well"

"Ouch, it's like you don't want me here. Sorry to disappoint, but this is my home Roppi-kun." Izaya smirked, "And unfortunately we can't leave just yet. We have some work to do."

An incredulous look was shot back at him, "What work? Can't we do it later? I'm going to be late to question that woman who claims she's met Yodogiri. Her shift ends in an hour, and she's hard to catch alone."

Izaya waved his hand dismissively, "Forget her, she won't have anything plausible."

A frown, "How would you know?"

"Trust me, I know her type. She's less interested in helping, and more interested in lending a hand if you know what I mean."

Judging by Roppi's blank look, he didn't really understand what he was implying.

"Never mind. Either way, everything we need right for now is in here." He waved the file in his hand that Namie gave him the night before.

He set it down on the coffee table and opened it up, spreading the files on the glass surface.

"This is what we know about him so far. He's an informant like myself, and an annoyingly skilled one at that, he's quite an expert at covering his tracks. He has access to a skilled plastic surgeon, identity unknown, and he is constantly changing his appearance. He is often using aliases and he's even used decoys to throw others off his trail. It's almost impossible to track him if you don't know what to look for. The majority of the people who've worked with him have no idea that he's Yodogiri Jinnai until after he's long gone. It's more him using his clients than vice versa. He's left people, companies broke, in tatters, dysfunctional or worse. What a piece of work, isn't he?"

"You're one to talk" Roppi retorted remembering the times he's seen Izaya toying with people.

"Hey now, I'm different from him! I'd never do anything to hurt my precious humans, I only have a little fun. This guy on the other hand, doesn't care whether people live or die, as long as he gets what he wants. Comparing me to him is like comparing a careful incision of a scalpel and hacking off an arm with a chainsaw." Izaya sniffed distastefully.

He continued reading the file, "His ultimate goal seems to be obtaining immortality. Whether he has found a method to acquire it is unknown. In terms of where his base of operations is, his former base was where he worked, at Yodogiri Shinning Corporation until he stopped coming into work a month ago. Currently, it appears that he has more than one: Osaka, Ikebukuro and Shinjuku. As of right now, we have no leads to the locations of these bases, nor do we have leads to anyone working there. It'd be nice to get a mole in one of those somehow, if we find anyone working with Yodogiri we could capitalize on that idea. Some of his most recent movements: tried to kill me, he obtained information on Awakusu's new weapon, most likely will talk to the Asuki-kai, another neighbouring yakuza group, and he attempted to capture Hijiribe Ruri from his own company."
It didn't make sense to him. Even after learning more information about their enemy, Roppi was still left with more questions, "For someone who wants to be immortal, he sure makes a lot of suicidal moves. The Awakusu-kai wants him dead now, and they're not the only ones. If he's been so careful to erase his tracks before, then why is he making noticeable moves and become sloppy all of a sudden?"

"Yes, it's strange isn't it? Even after learning his motives, his actions don't add up. We must have missed something. And you're right, his movements are a little too rash and cocky. Maybe he has some sort of trump card?"

Roppi clenched his fists. He worked hard collecting information with Kida and yet they were no closer in finding that bastard.

A brown envelope suddenly slapped the side of his face.

"Ow bastard...what the hell is this?" he said as he took it and turned it over in his hand.

"A reason why you shouldn't be pouting already, and your new task."

Roppi opened the envelope and retrieved several photos from inside. He looked through them curiously. They were all pictures of a bunch of men whom he didn't recognize.

"What's this?"

"That is a compilation I've been putting together for the past month of all the sightings of Yodogiri Jinnai to date. I pretty much looked at any photos taken at a time and place that guy has been sighted, and if I was lucky I'd get a clear shot of a face that matches the description."

Roppi looked through the pictures, there was a lot. Each picture had (what appeared to be) a different man circled in each, but he knew that Yodogiri's face was never consistent. The fact that Izaya had gone and took every description of the man he had on file and cross-referenced the time and place with every picture he had at his disposal (the internet was indeed a magical and vast place) to find all these pictures was nothing short of amazing.

"These recent shots here were thanks to the information you got yesterday." Izaya noted holding up three photographs that looked like they were screen captures of a security camera.

'So I was helpful then' Roppi thought. It was relieving to know. He would've felt worse after seeing all this work Izaya put into find their target, and realizing he didn't help at all. "What do you need me to do with these?"

Izaya smiled, "You take them to an expert"

Awakusu Akane was special girl.

She was given the best of everything. The finest clothes, the finest food, the finest toys, the finest of anything a girl her age could wish for.

And regardless of how gifted she was, she was sweet. Neither spoilt nor bratty, and kind to other children no matter what kind of upbringing they had. She had a large circle of friends and she was respected and loved by her peers.

She was a happy child.
The keyword in that statement: was.

Recently, she discovered her father and grandfather's art gallery business was a legal cover for their true "business" operation.

*A Yakuza syndicate.*

Slowly she became aware of how her peers really viewed her. With fear.

They all treated her well, never disagreed with her, and always did what she asked (not that she would ask much), all because their parents had told them to do so. For they knew she was the Awakusu Akane, granddaughter of the leader of Awakusu-kai. If they upset her in anyway, they didn't know how her father or grandfather and their subordinates would retaliate, but they knew it would be dangerous for them. That is why they trained their kids to treat her with the upmost respect and politeness. Like little brainwashed servants.

She once overheard one of her friend's parents nagging her to 'make sure to treat Akane-chan nicely today, or else'.

This revelation devastated her. Her friendships were a lie. All her friends treated her the way they did only because their parents told them to, or they feared her own family.

They feared her...They all feared her...They all-

A finger poked the crease forming between her eyebrows, "Would you stop frowning like that? You look like a Granny."

Except one.

Akane blinked in confusion, "Ah..Ryou-kun. Sorry, I was thinking of something."

Maeda Ryou, a cute boy who sat in front of her desk, whom she considered her close (now closest) friend. He straddled his chair to face her as he rested his arms on the backrest. He was always aloof with her. He'd always state his opinions without caring if it would bother her or not. He'd challenge her while other people would back her up without a second thought. Yet he was kind to her (in his own way). Though, his antics cost him many friends. They feared if he went too far one day, Akane's family would deal with him personally. So they kept their distance, not wanting to get involved with that kind of trouble. He didn't seem to mind, he usually kept to himself. The only one he bothered to talk to was Akane.

"Stop bothering Akane, Ryou! How can you call her a granny! Apologize to her right now!" one of Akane's 'friends' scolded.

"No one asked you," he replied sullenly. For a good-looking boy, he sure was moody.

Akane smiled to her 'friend', "That's alright Mai-chan. You don't need to make him apologize."

Her friend stopped glaring at him obediently. "Alright, did you want to come eat lunch? We're going to the roof to eat today."

"That's okay, I'd rather stay here, you guys go on without me" Akane said keeping her smile as best as she could.

"Whatever you say Akane-chan!" Her friend left, she didn't question her, nor did she try to convince her to come along. She obeyed Akane to the letter. It made Akane sad.
"Seriously, why do you put on smiles like that?" Ryou frowned, "You should be more honest with your feelings. Then maybe she'll get the picture and leave you alone."

Akane smiled a little more genuinely at his comment. "I don't want to cause any trouble. She'll worry if I suddenly become sad."

"She doesn't give a damn about what you feel. They're like that, they're all like that."

Akane's lip wobbled, she bit it to stop it from trembling. That was exactly what she feared, hearing Ryou say it only confirmed the truth.

Ryou's eyes widened. "Uh…no, I didn't mean it in that way! I meant they're all stupid like that. You should forget about all those people. They don't care about you like I do!"

Akane looked at him in surprise and Ryou slapped his hand over his mouth.

"I-I mean…you know, that you're important…it's not like…I'm arrrrghh" Ryou simply gave up trying to explain himself and buried his face in his arms.

She giggled and wiped the corner of her eye with her sleeve. Ryou's silliness always cheered her up, and it warmed her heart to know he was only like this with her and no one else.

"Ryou-kun, you really are a good friend."

He grumbled into his arms, "Yeah…aren't I the best."

She giggled again and pulled out her lunch box, now that she wasn't worrying as much, she was starting to feel hungry.

Ryou eventually lifted his head and propped his chin on his arms, surveying her face as she ate, "So, what were you thinking about that got you so upset?"

"…" she paused before taking a bite, but didn't answer his question.

"You can talk to me you know, instead of that other guy…"

Akane shook her head, "Nakura-san is a little older that's why I go to him for advice. And I don't want you to get too involved with me…you'll get in trouble."

"I've already told you, I don't care what those morons say to me. And I'm not scared of your old man either. So forget that Nakura person and tell me. I'm your friend aren't I?"

Without a doubt, Ryou was her best friend. He wasn't scared of her, he would always speak his mind and he didn't care that her family was a well-known yakuza syndicate.

So he would tell her if he thought her idea was a stupid one or not.

Akane has thought about it for a long time now. Her family, her friends, everything that she thought she was blessed with, was a lie. They were all wearing masks hiding what they truly were, it was a destructive environment that would only hurt her the more time she spent in it. It was already hurting her.

"Ryou-kun, I want to run away."

After work was a time to take a break and unwind for Tom after dealing with difficult clients and
listening to their sob stories and flimsy excuses to pay the money back later.

He wished he could lay back and relax as usual, but Shizuo was in "lost in thought" mode again.

Today seemed longer than usual since Shizuo couldn't focus on getting the clients to co-operate. Instead, Tom was left to deal with them on his own for the most part. Yes, he was thankful Shizuo wasn't flying off the handle for every troublesome debtor and causing property damage, but he had to admit that it did speed up the process a lot.

The two of them were heading back from dropping off today's collections at the office. They stopped at the crosswalk, waiting for the lights to change. Tom eyed his junior with concern, he didn't like to pry, but if it was going to affect his work, then he'd have confront Shizuo about whatever was bothering him. Again. But before he could say something, Shizuo beat him to it.

"Why do people act different from their usual selves Tom-san?"

Tom pulled out a cigarette, "…does this have something to do with our talk the other day?"

Shizuo nodded. "Yeah, I get the feeling that guy's not trying to trick me. But he's not acting like himself at all. I want to figure out why."

Tom raised an eyebrow and exhaled a stream of smoke, "Hmm…I guess it could mean a number of things…like he's hiding something, or he's in trouble…"

"Nah, not like that. He's not acting strange in that way. I mean he's acting like a completely different person. Like a character-change or something."

"Oh…I see." Tom scratched his cheek with a puzzled expression, not quite understanding what he meant by that.

The two of them walked into Russian Sushi after a warm greeting from Simon. When they took their seats at the bar, Tom rattled off his order to Dennis and turned to Shizuo expectantly. Noticing he was still lost in thought, Tom ordered the same for his junior. Dennis brought them a bottle of sake, which Tom took gratefully.

"Maybe there's two of him" Shizuo mused out loud.

"I think we can rule that out as a possibility." Tom laughed, "I guess that kind of behavior could mean a number of things…the only thing that comes to mind is split-personality, or maybe even bipolar disorder-"

"What's that?"

"I don't know the specifics of it, but they're mental disorders. Split personality is the one where a person would have a bunch of alter egos, bipolar disorder is when the person jumps between moods or somethin' like that," he replied before taking a few satisfying gulps of his alcohol. "I'm no expert, but I think it occurs to people when they're under lots of stress or they went through some trauma. It's probably their mind's way of coping through difficult times."

Shizuo took in Tom's explanation.

And suddenly, everything made sense to him. Like the final piece of the puzzle clicked into place, and the whole image became clear.

"That's it. That's why he's acting weird. Izaya was twisted and demented in the head. He must have
finally lost it and caught that bipolar something disease. That explains why he wasn't acting like himself."

"Bipolar disorder, also it's not something you 'catch',' Tom scratched the back of his head awkwardly, "And I don't think that's what is going on."

Shizuo shook his head "No, that's got to be it, it's the most logical answer right? That flea finally lost it. And that's why he's all nice and shit. It makes perfect sense doesn't it?"

'Not really...' the older man internally sighed. Dennis placed their orders in front of them.

"Couldn't it be that you've finally seen the good side of Izaya and it's changing your perspective of him?"

Shizuo was quiet for a while, snapping his chopsticks apart, "I like what I said better."

Roppi released another miserable sigh as he stared up at the apartment complex in front of him, restlessly shifting his weight from one foot to the other.

The entire trip here he was thinking of excuses not to go (Shingen would be there, Shingen would be there), but he only came up with more reasons why he should probably go through with it.

'The quicker I do it, the quicker I can get over this and the closer we'll be to finding that guy' he reasoned.

As he was distracted with his own thoughts, he arrived at his destination before he realized, and regretted that he didn't pay more attention so that he could've taken a longer route.

Instead, he forced himself to walk into the lobby and headed towards the elevator.

He distracted himself with his phone as he waited for the elevator to arrive. A new message for Shitei-ken greeted him.

Shitei-ken: Any plans for today?

He answered it, having nothing else to occupy his time.

Hachimen: Just a visit I really don't want to go to.

Shitei-ken: Haha, work?

Hachimen: Something like that. I'm dreading it, I'd rather not go, but I have to.

Shitei-ken: Hmm, maybe this will cheer you up. It lifts my spirits when I see it [Image]

Roppi tapped the link and the image began to download. A photo of a kitten wrapped in a fluffy blanket appeared on his screen. He blinked. It was...adorable. He hardly noticed the arrival of the elevator, he boarded it with the other person waiting next to him as if his body was on autopilot.

Hachimen: That's... really cute. Is it yours?

Shitei-ken: No, I just look up cute pictures of animals sometimes (^_^;)

Hachimen: I kind of want one now...
Shitei-ken: Eh, Hachimen-san likes cats? That's surprising

Hachimen: Shut up! I didn't say that!

A giggle from beside him caught his attention. The girl who got on the elevator with him was peering over his shoulder at his phone.

Roppi scowled at her and purposefully tilted his screen away from her sight.

The girl didn't look embarrassed at getting caught at all, in fact she winked at him knowingly, "But you totally do like cats, don't you?"

"Don't you know it's rude to read other people's private conversations?"

"Don't you know it's rude to skip a date without notice, Orihara-san?"

After taking in her face, he realized that this was the girl he was supposed to meet earlier regarding the tip she had for him.

"Ah, Rokujo Aya, correct? How did you find me?" he asked a little concerned how she managed to locate him. She wasn't some sort of stalker was she?

"You walked right by me silly! I didn't say anything because I thought you were trying to conspicuously lead me somewhere private for our date, you dog you."

He felt a vein in his temple throb, was she seriously that dense? "I just had questions for you, I said nothing about a date."

"Fine then, since we're alone you can ask me right? What questions did you have?" she asked.

She was a little too confident. She met his irritated gaze without batting an eye, like she knew how to handle people of his caliber, unlike the oblivious neutral party he was informed she was. Or maybe she was really that foolishly overconfident with herself.

Returning his attention to his phone, he answered passively, "Thanks for the offer, but I've managed to find everything I needed already. Your service is no longer required. I apologize for not notifying you properly."

"Hmmm…that's too bad. You know, I could know more about the guy you're looking for more than you know. You just need to ask."

As the elevator neared his destination, his need to end this conversation rose with it. Roppi understood what Izaya meant earlier, and he was right, this girl clearly had other intentions other than to help him, if her suggestive tone was anything to go by.

"I'll pass."

She sighed, "Well if you change your mind, here."

She handed him a thick card with a phone number on it. He didn't miss the very unsubtle winking face drawn next to it. "That's my number. You'll never know when you reach a dead end in your search. You'll want to pull up any information you can when that time comes right?"

The elevator chimed, and the doors mercifully opened. Roppi strode out, hoping with all his might that she didn't follow. She didn't, she only sent him a wink as the elevator doors closed between them.
Roppi grit his teeth. Humans could be really irksome if they wanted to be.

As he turned to walk towards the apartment he was heading to, he remembered why he was apprehensive about coming here. He knocked on the door and a familiar bespectacled face answered.

"Oh, Izaya. I wasn't expecting you. Did you get hurt or something?" Shinra admonished, as he held the door open for him to enter.

Roppi entered, quickly glancing down to see if there were any other shoes, "No, I'm here for a different reason. Is anyone else here?"

"Just Celty, why?" he asked, shutting the door.

Roppi let out a breath he didn't know he was holding, "Good. I was hoping that stupid doctor wasn't here."

Shinra raised an eyebrow.

"No, not you. Your dad, Shingen" he explained. "Izaya sent me on an errand of sorts. I didn't want him to hold me up if he was here."

The younger doctor's eyes lit up in understanding, "Oh, Roppi! Gosh, I thought you were Izaya. Come in, take a seat" he said cheerfully as he ushered Roppi to the living room. "Father actually moved out a while ago. You don't have to worry about running into him here."

Well that made Roppi feel silly about making a big fuss about coming here.

Celty waved to him from the kitchen, Roppi gave her a distracted wave back, he was caught a little off guard since she wasn't wearing her helmet. It was the first time seeing her without it; her neck was exposed, and as rumored, there was no head above it. A curious black smoke rose from where her throat was sectioned off. The same black smoke that he saw materialize into shadows that defended him from bullets during the confrontation with the yakuza when things went awry.

Rather than fear of her appearance, he felt awe. The Headless Rider, she truly was headless, a fact he was previously skeptical about, but secretly wished was true. The legend was standing before him… making tea. Regardless of the domestic setting, her presence was still surreal no matter how he looked at it.

Shinra sat down across from him and smiled, "You said something about an errand? How can I assist?"

"Well, right now the both of us are in the middle of a search for a man called Yodogiri Jinnai."

Shinra frowned and nodded, he knew of the man. Hardly anyone involved with the underground society didn't know his name, and had the sense to not get too close to him.

"We managed to obtain a few pictures that people have identified as him. The problem is that they are all faces of different people."

Shinra nodded for him to continue, not quite seeing where he was going with this. Celty joined them, bringing a tray of snacks and tea for the three of them.

Roppi continued, "We found that Yodogiri frequently alters his face with plastic surgery. With your experience in the field, can you look at these and tell me anything that I wouldn't catch about the people in these photos? Anything at all?"
Shinra picked up a few photos and examined them, quickly skimming through them with a critical eye. Celty also curiously peered at the photos.

The doctor hummed, tilting his head to the side. "Hmm, well I can tell you that it's highly likely it's the same guy in all these pictures. The shape of his face and bone structure is the same. Also, look at the faint scars at the side of the face, they are from the surgery, they look the same on each person."

Shinra kept shuffling through the pile of pictures, and paused. "Huh…"

"What is it?" Roppi asked.

"This guy," the young doctor pointed at a picture of a dark-haired man, "He has no scars. And his bone structure is different from the others."

Roppi took the photo and examined it, it was a recent picture taken from a security camera.

[Could it be that's the real Yodogiri Jinnai?], Celty asked.

"I don't know, it could be someone he trusts going in his place. Either way, this is good. It's a solid lead. If we can find out who this guy is, we can get closer to Yodogiri."

"Wait, here's another one. This one, he doesn't have any scars but a similar facial structure as the others. Judging by his skin, he's much younger too."

Celty flinched in surprise, [That guy! I've seen him several times around town before.]

Roppi took the second photo and narrowed his eyes, "This guy is…"

"I-zah-ya! Long-time no see!" a familiar towering figure in front of Russia Sushi called out to him.

"Simon, long time no see" Izaya acknowledged with a nod.

"You come to eat sushi? Sushi good! Make belly full! We make good sushi for good customer!" the Russian man gushed.

Izaya nodded politely, "I'll be taking you up on that then."

In truth, he was more interested in running into a familiar face. Izaya just saw Tanaka Tom leave the restaurant and had an inkling that maybe his rampaging partner was still inside. He wanted to catch him if at all possible. It's been a while since he last bothered Shizu-chan after all.

"Private room better! Shi-zu-o at bar. No fighting, fighting bad! Sushi good!" Simon nodded.

'Guess I'm in luck' Izaya smirked. "Thanks Simon, don't worry. I'm not here to pick a fight… necessarily."

He ducked under the noren hanging over the restaurant's entry and surveyed the place.

Dennis greeted him from behind the bar with a stern look. He silently motioned him to choose whichever private room he wanted, wisely not wanting to bring attention to Izaya's arrival.

Izaya waved him off and approached the bar. He spotted his target on the farthest seat, slouched on the counter surrounded by a few flasks of sake. Izaya lips quirked in amusement as he headed over and sat down next to him.
Dennis sighed and called Simon back inside for safe measure.

Izaya wondered what Shizuo would do when he notices him. Would he be angry? Confused? Or would he be tame like how he was with Roppi?

He wanted to see.

So he gingerly poked Shizuo's side.

Shizuo on the other hand was a bit dizzy, but mostly relaxed. It was nice to forget everything that has been bothering him, even if it was for a brief moment. He felt the haze of sleepiness teasing him, lulling him into a state of complete relaxation, far away from thoughts of…

_Poke. Poke. Poke._

"Hey, Shizu-chan. What're you doing sleeping in a place like this?"

_Izaya._

Suddenly a lot less drowsy, Shizuo opened one blearily, disbelieving eye and confirmed that yes, Orihara Izaya had appeared right next to him.

"What's wrong Shizu-chan, had one too many? Can't see straight? Going to make a few decisions you'll regret in the morning?"

He frowned. Definitely him alright. Calling him that annoying nickname as usually does. As… annoying as…he usually does?

He blinked, trying to focus on the man sitting next to him, "…Flea?"

"Shizu-chan?" he mimicked back to him.

This wasn't the same Izaya from the last time. He knew this Izaya. This was the Izaya who knew how to piss him off by just breathing. This one was the one that left a bad taste in his mouth. This wasn't the one that would confuse him and threw him off with respect and submissive behaviour.

This one, he was familiar with.

'So he really had that split-mental thing?' Shizuo's alcohol infused brain tried to remember what Tom had called it.

It was strange that even though the current Izaya was back to normal, Shizuo wasn't going ballistic, nor did he feel like getting angry by looking at his smug face. Now when he saw Izaya's face, he remembered how he smiled when Shizuo helped him, or how he looked contorted in pain from taking that bullet. He saw that Izaya wasn't just a prick with no feelings, he had seen the human side to him. Now that he saw that other side of him, that image couldn't be unseen.

But he still infuriated him like before. Yes, the flea's attitude pissed him off. But the sight of him didn't seem to anymore. Which he supposed was an improvement.

"What the hell are you doin' here?" he slurred, checking the flasks in front of him for more alcohol.

Izaya looked a little surprised at the question shot at him instead a fist to the face.

"What? A guy can't grab a bite to eat?"
"Not in Ikebukuro, if it's you." He found a flask with a little more sake inside and knocked it back without a word.

"How rude Shizu-chan, have some compassion. How can I function without indulging in some of Dennis' wonderful ootoro from time to time?"

Shizuo pinned him with a hard stare. There was no trace of the Izaya he spoke to the other day. It was like he was a completely different person. He needed to know for sure.

"You're different today."

"Am I? But I'm always like this." The informant seemed more amused than uncomfortable with the accusation.

"Cut the crap. There is, or was something wrong with you. You've been acting strange the past few times you came down to 'Bukuro. I don't know what the hell it was, you were quieter or modest or something. But it was just off. And now you're back to normal again. Just what the hell was that? And don't fucking say that was just some act, because I can see through your bullshit, that was no act. Just what are you hiding?"

Izaya was taken aback. This is what he hated about Shizuo. At times he would be a complete dimwit, but he'd be sharp at the most inopportune times. The raven simply shrugged, frowning slightly, "I'm afraid I don't know what you're talking about."

"You're sick aren't you?" Shizuo asked getting straight to the point, knowing Izaya would drag this on longer than his patience would last.

Izaya blinked, "Huh?"

"Yeah, I know you're sick or whatever. The polar bear disease or something."

"Polar…bear? What in the world have you been drinking Shizu-chan?" Izaya laughed.

"Shaddup! It's when you have two different moods or personalities or some shit, Tom-san told me about it."

Izaya bit his lip to stop himself from laughing harder, with Shizuo getting riled up and slightly intoxicated, it wouldn't do him any good to push him over the edge, "You wouldn't happen to mean Bipolar disorder?"

"Yeah, that. You have it or not?"

Izaya didn't bother correcting his idea of 'Bipolar Disorder', but if this protozoan was willing to take that as an answer for 'his drastic personality changes' then he'd go with it.

With a put on sigh, he replied with false reluctance, "…I suppose I can't hide it now. I do have it, but you can't say a word to anyone."

Shizuo looked slightly amused for his part for learning a very human flaw in his foe. "Sure."

"…That's it? You're going to agree just like that?" Izaya was perplexed at how easily Shizuo backed down. Not that it was a real secret, but he assumed that he'd jump on the chance to hang that information over his head.

He shrugged at him in response, "Whatever, it's not my business anyway."
Trying to understand what went through Shizuo's head was impossible. He never got a chance to find out through all the years they knew each other. They always fought, that's just how things were. Now sitting down with Shizuo, he was able to appreciate just talking with him. They knew each other well as enemies, but they never tried sitting down as friends. It never seemed to be an option.

"We haven't had one of these before, a normal conversation I mean." Izaya mused.

Shizuo raised a brow, "We talked like this at the parfait shop didn't we?"

The informant frowned. How it irked him that Roppi got to experience this side of Shizuo before he did. "Technically that was my other half. I don't remember it clearly."

Shizuo looked confused, "So you and…your other half are separate? You don't share the same memories?"

Oh well, might as well make up something Izaya thought, "In a sense. He doesn't remember anything from my past. I also can't control what he does, and he can't control what I do. I don't like what he does with my body for the most part, but there are some things I approve of. Like for example…" Izaya reached over and pinched the blonde's cheek, "Does this hurt~?"

Shizuo growled, "You fucking flea…you do remember."

"Bits and pieces. Like you telling me you gave your blood to save me. Remind me again why you did such a thing?"

Shizuo's skin felt warmer under his fingertips. Izaya's lips pulled into an amused smirk "What's this, are you blushing? I didn't know Shizu-chan was capable of being so cute."

Shizuo's eyes darkened. "Oy flea, if you wanted me to mess you up so badly, you should've just said so."

Izaya bit his lip, Shizuo had the same look in his eyes in the dream he had. Similar words, but different tone.

He shivered unconsciously but hid it behind a devilish smirk, "Then mess me up, Shizu-chan."

There were a number of things Shizuo was expecting to say, and that wasn't one of them. And with that hungry look in his eye. It didn't make any sense to him. He must be drunker than he thought if he was starting to see things.

"Don't tempt me, Izaya-kun" he growled back.

"I don't think you'll do it. For the same reason you saved me that day, and the same reason you gave your blood."

"Yeah? What would you know about it?" Shizuo met his eyes defiantly.

Izaya leaned in closer, his voice dropped down low, "I was never good at understanding you, Shizu-chan. But they're all connected, that's all I know. Whatever you're thinking, I'll find out soon enough."

Shizuo swallowed. He could feel Izaya's breath ghosting over his lips. He was close, too close. The intoxicated blond wasn't sure why he didn't push him away yet. He wondered what exactly Izaya was trying to do, talking to him like that. Looking at him like that. But for some reason, he didn't stop...
it. Right now he was content to let Izaya do as he pleased. He blamed the alcohol.

But he didn't do anything. He straightened himself as if nothing happened a moment before.

A silence passed between the two of them. Dennis reappeared with Izaya's usual order now that he was assured that they wouldn't tear the place apart. Izaya ordered another round of sake for the both of them.

"Hey Shizu-chan…do you ever think what things would be if it was different? If we never fought? If we were actually on good terms?"

It could be the sake that loosened his lips, because he didn't hesitate when he answered, "Yeah…I've thought about it."

"Oh? And?"

"And I would've had enough money to go to college if I didn't have to pay for all that property damage."

"Pfft. Hahaha! Figures that's what you'd be worried about."

The corner of Shizuo's lips twitched betraying his annoyed frown, "That was a lot of money flea. I could've been an accountant or somethin'. Not that I don't like my job now or anything"

Izaya snorted imagining Shizuo as an accountant. He'd probably flip tables if the balance sheets didn't add up properly. Or maybe his head would explode with number overload.

Not noticing Izaya's amusement or not caring, Shizuo took a contemplative sip of his drink, "Even if I try to think how different the past could've been, just thinking about it isn't going to change anything. What happened can't be taken back…" his face adopted a pensive look, most likely remembering something from his past that he wished he could rewrite. "We fought because I am who I am, and you are who you are. We were never meant to get along. We were enemies since the day we met."

"Yeah. Yet here we are, drinking together." Izaya finished. "Things have changed all of a sudden."

Shizuo hummed, "Yeah. I never thought I'd be able to sit down with you. Hell, two months ago, I would've beaten up anyone who told me that I would."

"So what now? Where do we stand" Izaya rested his chin on the palm of his hand offering Shizuo a side glance.

'That's what I've been wondering since this whole mess started' Shizuo ran his fingers through his hair, "Hell if I know. We're far from pals, I'll tell you that much. But the idea of that…I don't think it's that impossible anymore."

"…you oaf."

Shizuo tried to glare at him but his eyes widened slightly at the look that crossed Izaya's face. He looked genuinely happy.

Izaya entered the apartment humming. It wasn't unusual for him, but he seemed extra happy today, even after all that serious talk they had in the morning. It was only after Izaya practically skipped over to his chessboard when Roppi decided to say something.
"You're in a good mood" noted Roppi from his seat at his table. He was distractedly typing away on Izaya's computer.

"That's because I ran into Shizu-chan"

The sound of keyboard tapping ceased. Roppi's gaze snapped away from the screen and re-evaluated Izaya's appearance. "…Are you alright?"

"Never better!"

"…You know, I'm starting to wonder what exactly the relationship is between the two of you."

It was strange, he felt a pang of something. He thought that maybe Shizuo treated him differently from Izaya because he somehow subconsciously felt that they were two different people. But it looked like he didn't attack Izaya either.

Izaya shrugged, still grinning, "We obviously hate each other."

Roppi shot him a skeptical look, but didn't question him further.

"By the way, you don't have to worry about acting strange anymore. He seems to believe that I have some form of split personality. You don't have to worry about making him suspicious. Such a simpleton."

For some reason talking about Izaya and Shizuo made him feel uneasy, so he changed the subject. "Well, I got some news regarding the pictures I got Shinra to look at. There's good news and bad news, what would you like to hear first Izaya?"

Izaya tilted his head in thought, "Doesn't matter, regardless of what I hear first, there is going to be more news that will contrast my mood anyway."

"Bad news first then." Roppi held up a photo, "Here is a one of the recent photos of an alleged sighting of Yodogiri Jinnai. However according to Shinra, the man in the picture is different from all the other photos taken because he doesn't have any scars from plastic surgery that the others have, and his bone structure is different-"

"So he could be someone close enough to Yodogiri to send in his place. That's a solid lead, how is that bad news?"

"I can't get a positive ID on him. So his identity is still a mystery, for now."

Izaya nodded. That wasn't too bad, Izaya could find out who he was or where to find him in under a week.

"So what's the good news then?"

Roppi smirked as he held up another photo, "This guy is the same deal as the last. Recent photo, no plastic surgery scars. But I managed to identify him."

Izaya took the photo. It was the picture of that was taken from a security camera of the man who was seen meeting up with Satoshi, both of them were visible in the shot.

"His name on record is Saeki Masaru. He dropped out of high school eight years back, and has since moved out of his house. There are some sources that say that he had some ties with the underground society at the time, but with mostly under the radar work, nothing radical. Currently, he's been laying
low, his whereabouts unknown. But I dug up some interesting information; around the time he was born, his parents got divorced and he took his mother's maiden name. His original name was Yodogiri Masaru. He's Yodogiri's biological son."

A mirthful glimmer shone in Izaya's eyes as he took in the face of the male in the photo, "Is that right?"

"Celty mentioned she's seen him around town often. She said if she ever catches sight of him again she'll let us know his location immediately."

The informant patted his lookalike on the shoulder, "Well in any case, it looks like we finally got line on the uncatchable Yodogiri Jinnai. How should we serve him up to the Awakusu? Grilled? Fried?"

Roppi's lips quirked in amusement, "It doesn't matter. As long as he burns."

"Have you gotten in touch with Orihara Izaya?"

"In a sense, yes."

"What have you learned?"

"Nothing that we don't already know. Except…I found out he has a soft spot for cats"

"…Keep on it and get me something useful."

"Yes sir. But with all due respect, I say that its good leverage. Maybe if I put on cat ears, he'll fall for me, nyan~…"

Ignoring the rambling and moving on, "How are things on your end Masaru-kun? I trust you have gotten in contact with the men in the Asuki group?"

"Yeah, it was tough work. They're being extra cautious since they know our reputation and all. But I got them to come around in the end with my amazing skills."

"Good job Masaru-kun. Dependable as usual."

"Ehh, you don't have to be so flattering, calling me amazing in front of everyone, it's embarrassing!"

"Boss didn't call you amazing, you said that yourself."

"Hey brat, I get I'm awesome, but you don't have to be so jealous about it"

"Who's jealous of you, you narcissist?"

"Stop fighting you two, nyan~!"

"Enough."

A cold, no-nonsense tone cut through the bickering like a sharp knife. Everyone fell silent and returned their attention to their boss.

"Must I remind you that this isn't all fun and games? We still have a long way to go if this is how far we've gotten. Now that the Awakusu-kai and Orihara Izaya have teamed up, our movements need to be discrete. Mistakes lead to getting caught. Getting caught leads to death."
His words were met with more silence.

"It would've been easier to have gotten rid of him when we had the chance -"

"I'm sorry Boss, I was sure that my guy would've -"

"Masaru, don't interrupt." The man in question fell silent. "It's unfortunate that our first attempt to get rid of Orihara Izaya lead to not only him and the yakuza joining forces, but it also cost us our mole within the Awakuzu-kai. But not all is lost. Izaya will come looking for us, and when he gets close enough, we'll take care of him, for good this time. For now we'll focus on two important tasks: retrieving the weapon and the head, and getting all the players ready for the final stage."

All members present knew what he was referring to. They've been planning it for a long time after all.

"It's a war ladies and gentlemen, and Yodogiri Jinnai is the one who'll emerge victorious."
Making The Same Mistakes

Chapter Summary

A glimpse at what Emilia and the synthetic brain have been up to. Emilia has been busy giving him some upgrades. Roppi deals with some trouble with the yakuza. And Shizuo makes another appearance.

Two Months Ago, The Nebula Labs in America

His body was strange and he knew it.

If he were to explain it, his body was imaginary, it had no physical form. But if he put his mind to it, he could lift his 'arms', kick his 'legs', and even pat his 'face' with his 'hands'. He could feel them move, he could feel them connect with each other, but if he were to lift a limb to his 'eyes', he wouldn't see anything.

This was because his 'eyes' existed, but his body did not.

This was what it was like to be a certain synthetic brain. The same brain that Shingen and Roppi had left behind in America along with Emilia.

He looked at the table space in front of him, there was a small fly sitting there. He reached for it, but as expected, nothing came from the action. There was no arm to brush it away. The fly sat there undisturbed.

Shingen had given him a camera for eyes, and a microphone for ears. He also had given him a sensor pad so that he could feel, however did not function as a specific body part. The touch would register on different areas all over his body every time, it was unpredictable and random, and quite distressing in some cases. He wasn't sure if that function was intentional or a careless mistake on Shingen's part.

Though it seemed inconvenient, he couldn't bring himself to hate it. Like his makeshift eyes and ears, they were connections to the outside world. It was the only way he could interact with the world around him. And he would gladly take what he could get, no matter the inconvenience.

Although, there were some times were he would take back those words, like now, when the fly decided to walk over his track pad, sending unpleasant shivers up and down his spine.

Before there was nothing he would be able to do if there was something brushing his sensor pad, but now that Emilia had given him a speaking function, it was a different story.

[U-Um excuse me, Emilia-san? Could you help me please?] he called out to his caretaker.

"I will make the quickest arrival!" came a cheerful reply from the other side of table.

[Please hurry...] he said squirming uncomfortably.

He relaxed slightly as he heard the clacking of her heels signaling her approach.
"What does my little Honey-Moon request Mama to do, with respect?"

Ignoring the nickname he has been trying to dissuade her from using, he quickly told her his problem, *[There's a fly on my sensor pad, I'd appreciate it if you could brush it off]*

Emilia blinked and suddenly beamed at the bug, "Oh Alex! Your hiding spot has been discovered!"

She produced a pair of tweezers from her white coat and expertly snatched the fly from its perch. She placed it into a small container she retrieved from her pocket, leaving the fly completely unharmed through the quick capture. "Alex is an experiment of upmost importance! His lifespan has doubled like weeds! Big presentation soon with bosses~" she hummed happily as he inspected the container.

*[Speaking of which, I wanted to ask...after you give your presentation, will we be heading for Japan?]*

Emilia looked at him, slightly taken aback.

*[I mean...it's okay if you had more work, I'm fine with it! I was just curious. I haven't heard from Shingen or Roppi since they left...so I was wondering if they were alright...and when we'd get to see them again.]*

Emilia's face split into a teasing smirk, "Your love for him burns with the intensity of a thousand suns, yes~?"

*[E-Eh? W-What are you talking about all of a sudden? I-I'm worried because he's my friend!]*

"Yes, yes. Your words spin off the course of truth, but Mama knows best! The origin of your name is concrete evidence."

He spluttered trying to come up with an excuse but failed. When she implemented his speaking function, the first thing he told her was a name.

*[My name is Tsukishima, thank you for all your hard work!]*

Emilia was a little disappointed that he already chose a name for himself, but she was more interested why he chose that particular name.

Tsuki told her that he wanted a Japanese name just like Roppi. He chose the kanji 月, Tsuki, because Roppi had suggested that he should include "moon" into his name the last time they spoke. He also decided to use the kanji 島 for 'island'. He found it was appropriate to his current state. Isolated, detached from the world, and unable to reach others. In truth, he admitted he got the idea and kanji from Heiwajima Shizuo's name.

Emilia asked why he decided to take it from Shizuo's name in the first place, to which Tsuki shyly responded that he was Roppi's idol, and he wanted to be closer in some way to the man that Roppi respected.

After hearing his explanation, she slyly pointed out that all aspects of his name was heavily influenced by Roppi, and thought it was adorable that he loved him that much. Ever since then, she took every possible opportunity to tease him about it, to Tsuki's chagrin.

*[W-Well, be that as it may, they haven't been keeping in touch, and anything could've gone wrong. I want to go see them as soon as possible.]*

"Fear is proven unnecessary Tsukishima-kun. One surprise from myself to you, after which, we
make haste to the land of the rising sun! Perhaps for now, using unorthodox methods to keep tabs on them shall alleviate heartache, with respect!” she suggested as she walked away.

Tsukishima pondered on her advice.

Present Time, Ikebukuro

"This is the third fucking time!" Roppi growled into his headset as he ducked behind a stack of barrels. The sounds of gunshots and yelling echoed in the abandoned warehouse.

Roppi was meant to meet a group from the Awakusu-kai to exchange more information for their search. Izaya had him wear an earpiece, so that he could listen and instruct him whenever necessary. There was no such thing as being too careful when dealing with the Awakusu.

Both parties barely got past greeting each other, when they were suddenly attacked by group of armed men.

Lately, it has been happening to Roppi every time he left the apartment and it pissed him off. Sometimes it happened before meeting with the Awakusu, sometimes when he was coming back from a meeting. And it's even happened while he was speaking with them. Like now. What frustrated him more was that he hasn't been able to identify the assailants and their motive.

"Why do I get the feeling you sent them?"

"Now what good would that do? I need you, remember?" Izaya even managed to sound miffed about being accused of such slander, even though he had done so once before.

"Then how come they only attack me when I go out, and not you? And how the hell do they keep finding the meeting place? I made sure I wasn't being followed, and Yoshiro disclosed the location a few minutes ago!"

The line went silent for a while before Izaya spoke again, "I might have a good guess, but I'll be able to answer that if you can tell me more about the men attacking you."

Roppi groaned, the enemy's fire seemed to be unending, it would be risky to stick his head out to get a better look. He wasn't too keen on getting shot again.

Another man dove behind the wall of barrels, Roppi's hand shot into his pocket to grab his knife but relaxed slightly when he recognized his face.

"You better not be doing this on purpose Orihara, this is the third time this has happened."

"You don't have to remind me Yoshiro-san." Roppi muttered, "Do you catch a glimpse of the enemy this time?"

"Yeah, I did. It's definitely the guys from Asuki-kai. I knew I recognized them from somewhere."

Roppi and Izaya reached the same conclusion simultaneously.

"...that guy just loves messing with us doesn't he?"

Roppi grumbled, "Yodogiri…so he managed to win over the Asuki group then. He's sabotaging our meetings, and at the same time declaring war between your faction and theirs."

Yoshiro Ken offered him a brief glance while he reloaded his gun. "But how do they know where to
find us? We threw off any possible trails when we picked you up."

"I'm still trying to figure that out... but right now, we need an escape plan. We can't count on pushing them back with our numbers."

With his gun loaded and ready, Ken nodded, "We could probably distract them while my men get out."

Roppi hummed in response, "I hear you're good with guns, isn't that right?"

"Yeah, I'm pretty- wait, where are you going?"

Roppi stood up and climbed the stack of barrels. "Cover me."

When he reached the top, he picked up a barrel with a surprising show of strength. The Asuki men placed themselves in the middle, firing bullets with reckless abandon, didn't notice him until that point. They hastily turned to fire at him, to which Ken and the other men started firing back when their attention was shifted, taking out several in the process.

Roppi launched the barrel into the center of their formation. Ken aimed a shot at the flying projectile, the bullet pierced through the metal.

**BOOM**

A cloud of orange flames engulfed a few of the men unfortunate enough to get caught in the explosion, which otherwise knocked the rest of them off their feet, and out of consciousness.

On cue, Yoshiro Ken's men took the golden opportunity to make a mad dash to the exit. Ken himself stayed back to cover the escaping men from the remaining enemies that were well away from the explosion. He counted six remaining.

The men cursed and fell back to reload. The smoke from the explosion caused a screen, making it difficult to tell apart their enemies from their allies, making them hesitant to shoot.

Which was perfectly fine for Roppi.

As soon as the explosion went off, he jumped down from the barrels, and engaged with the remaining assailants.

The first victim was still distracted with the sight of the explosion. It was no wonder that he didn't notice the fist until it knocked him out. Another comrade nearby heard his cry, and turned his gun towards the sound. He was also caught off guard when his comrade's limp body came flying at him. His gun was knocked out of his hands, it went spinning off across the concrete and stopped near Roppi's feet.

He picked it and turned it over experimentally in his hand, feeling the heaviness in palm.

Using the smoke to cover his movements, one larger man threw himself at Roppi, tackling him from behind. Roppi tried to flip him but the man had him expertly secured, his full weight on Roppi's hips, one hand squeezing his throat, while the other reached for his gun. Before it could be taken away, Roppi blindly fired a behind him, hoping it would land on his intended target. The man's grip loosened as he howled in pain. Roppi's head shot up immediately, colliding with his forehead, knocking him out as well.

He shoved the man off of him, and looked at the gun again, he tossed it away with distaste, "Che,
such a loud contraption."

"That gunshot sounded really close. You didn't get shot did you? Not that it would keep you down anyway..."

Roppi let out an exasperated breath, he almost forgot Izaya was still on the line, "Shut up. I'm fine."

He also wanted to tease Izaya about how his voice sounded a little shaky, and ask if he was actually worried about him, but decided he preferred if the illusion wasn't shattered with Izaya's vehement denials.

Another man sneaked out of his hiding spot from behind him drawing out his gun. He was immediately shot by Ken who was keeping an eye on Roppi. Roppi spun and saw the man as he fell over. Without looking, he tossed a wave of thanks over his shoulder in the general direction where Ken was not doubt still watching.

That's the second time he was distracted during this scuffle, and it could've killed him (If they shot the right spot that is). It must have been too long since he fought like this. That or he has gotten too cocky.

With renewed focus, he darted forward towards his remaining two opponents.

Quick steps zigzagging left and right, he dodged the onslaught of bullets that came his way. He flung a throwing knife at the closet man, temporarily distracting him. Roppi swung his leg up and kicked his gun right out of his hand, and followed up with a propelled fist into the man's jaw, hearing a satisfying crack.

A gunshot and a sharp pain in his arm sprung him back into action to deal with the last remaining enemy. Easily ignoring the pain under the rush of adrenaline, Roppi closed the distance between the shooter and himself. The man pulled the trigger repeatedly in panic, only to hear a hollow clicking sound of an empty barrel. Roppi felt a small sadistic smirk take over his face as his fingers closed around the man's wrist and twisted.

"Good. Those things were starting to get on my nerves."

He slammed his forehead into the guy's nose, sending him reeling back. He yanked him back and gave him a right hook into his cheek. He wobbled in a daze before he also fell to the ground. Roppi briefly wondered if he enjoyed beating people up too much.

Unhurried footsteps approached him from behind, "Nice one Orihara." Ken commented. "Honestly, you didn't need to go that far. Everyone got out safely during the barrel explosion."

"I was pissed." Roppi stated simply, he was being honest, coordinating meetings with the Awakusu to find Yodogiri and track his movements was their next big step in capturing the bastard. But these ambushes have been setting them back, and the longer it took to coordinate the searches, the farther away he gets. And now knowing Yodogiri himself was responsible for it, it just pissed him off further.

"You said something about Yodogiri working with the Asuki-kai. Why would they agree to work with such a shady third party?"

"If I had to guess, Yodogiri probably told them about your 'secret weapon'."

Ken's eyes sharpened into an accusing glare, "So you do know about it."
"I hardly find that surprising, I was chased and shot for the damn thing, I thought it was only fair to know exactly what the Awakusu-kai was determined to keep safe. But rather than focusing on what I know, you should be more worried that now the Asuki-kai knows. And you can thank that Yodogiri-bastard for being so kind to announce your dirty little secrets."

A boisterous laugh interrupted what he was going to say next, "Hey, hey, heeeeeeey now! Don't go complimenting my esteemed self behind my back! Ha haa, I know I'm amazing, but that's just taking it too far!"

The two of them snapped their gazes to the second floor landing where two previously unnoticed figures stood. One looked to be the height of a child and chose to conceal his identity with a baggy hoodie. However, the other one stood proudly in his expensive attire, flaunting his visage, as he comfortably leaned over the railing as if he's been there watching the entire time.

Roppi's eyes narrowed as he recognized that man as he shamelessly stood before them even after being partially (or completely) responsible for the ambush.

"Yodogiri Masaru" he snarled.

"Eeeeh? You already know my name? The original one too! Wow, I'm so good that the people know my name before I introduce myself~"

"He's an informant you dumbass narcissist…he probably did his research. Actually, you should be worried that he knows your name" the smaller figure said as he cautiously tugged his hood lower.

"You have some nerve showing up here after all the shit you and your dad pulled with the Awakusu-kai" Yoshiro Ken snarled as he pulled out his gun and pointed it at the obnoxious male.

"Well, first I wasn't gonna show, but I thought it might be cruel for junior here not to see my greatness at work. And also I have a little message for you two. So if you could put down the gun Yoshiro Ken-chan? We both know you were ordered to bring me in alive if you ever got me."

As soon as he said this, a bullet whizzed past his head, barely ruffling the dark locks. Masaru lift his hand to brush the top of his ear, he smirked when he brought his hand back with blood on it.

"Don't ever call me that you little shit. I can still shoot you in places that won't kill you. Remember that."

Masaru laughed out loud, "So this is the famous blue demon's sharp shooter and his 'warning shot', huh?"

Roppi's eyes narrowed, he saw Masaru tilt his head a little to the left in anticipation of the bullet before he fired, reducing the damage slightly. He knew how Ken would react to his jibe and how. They were at a disadvantage; this man knew about their fighting style and came here to confront them armed with that knowledge. He also observed them fight a few minutes prior, and he already could predict their movements. Caution was their best option.

"What's your message?" Roppi grit out, clearly unhappy with their situation.

Masaru blinked, as if he forgot that he was there (which annoyed Roppi further), "Oh right. This is a formal announcement that the Asuki-kai is declaring war with the Awakusu-kai. And we are declaring war on you, Orihara Izaya."

Masaru said 'the Asuki-kai' as if they were a separate entity. So they weren't exactly working together. Then, who was this 'we' he was referring to?
Roppi frowned, "We? Meaning you and your father? That shorty over there too?"

The smaller figure bristled angrily, and Masaru grinned like a cat that caught a mouse, "Take it however you want. Yodogiri Jinnai is calling for a war against Orihara Izaya."

That was a strange reaction. Like Roppi fell into some kind of trap with what he said, and what he responded with after was strangely vague as well. Masaru interrupted his thoughts with a sudden declaration.

"I'll make this easy for you. Tomorrow, I'll come to Raira Academy's second ground. If you think you can beat someone as amazing as me, you're welcome to try it. Of course, this is also a way you can opt out of this war easily. If you bring that, we'll take it as a peace offering and we'll call off the whole thing."

"Bring what?"

"The face of an angel: the ticket to Nirvana," Masaru stated cryptically and turned to leave "Come on, Fourth. We're going."

"Shut up you stupid egotistic moron! Don't say that in front of him."

Indifferent to his ally's distress, Masaru simply laughed and walked away.

"Wait you bastard!" Roppi yelled as he started to run after them, he wasn't done with him yet, he was determined to catch the man he's been chasing this whole time.

The younger figure casually threw something at Roppi's direction before he also turned to leave.

When it hit the ground, it released a steady stream of thick white smoke that quickly filled the area.

"Tch...a smoke screen..." Ken hissed, "Come on"

He ordered Roppi to follow him. The two of them headed out of the warehouse. Ken hollered at his men to surround the warehouse, and to apprehend anyone they see leaving.

His men searched the area but were unable to find anything. When the smoke cleared, he sent more people inside, but they came up with the same result. Yodogiri Masaru escaped.

They were in one of the Awakusu's cars now, Ken offered to drop Roppi somewhere in the city.

"You'd think he'd be a little more careful about his movements when he's got this many people after him," Ken scoffed, "Tch, ballsy bastard. I should've shot him again."

"I've notice his movements have been a little too bold lately. He has something big planned, big enough that the idea of getting killed isn't enough to make him run away anymore. Then again, judging at how nervous the kid with him was, we can also assume Yodogiri wasn't aware his son was going to do something reckless like challenging me directly. He does seem the type. Proud, overconfident and a show-off. But I can't count on my enemy's weaknesses, I have to assume it's a trap."

Ken nodded as he processed the information, "Despite knowing that, are you planning on meeting him tomorrow?"

"It's risky," Roppi said as the car pulled to a stop, "but I'm not one who backs down from a challenge, and from such an annoying guy as well. I'll be ready for him." He opened the door and
slid out of his seat.

"You're one to talk." Ken chuckled as he tossed one more comment his way as he left the car, "Hey, Orihara...from now on, let's communicate over the phone or something. Meeting in person is going to be a pain from here on out."

Roppi scoffed and sent him a parting wave. The black car drove off.

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Mikado looked stressed and on edge all the time. Considering the situation right now, that was to be expected.

Kida figured keeping a close eye on Mikado was not healthy, but he couldn't help it.

Lately, noticed that the gangs have been making strange movements. Rumours have been piling up. Tension started to rise. Fights were breaking out over nothing. It was like the gang war all over again.

It was only natural that he kept an eye on Mikado and Anri to make sure they weren't getting into something dangerous.

Little incidents, that's how it started. Little incidents like a little vandalism on another group's turf, a few small scuffles here and there. Then it started escalating. People going missing for days at a time, only to turn up at a hospital days later, spewing something about another group attacking them.

'I was done in by the Dollars...'

'The Toromaru got me'

'The Slashers are at it again'

'It was the Blue Squares'

'The Yellow Scarves did it!'

Kida could vouch for the Yellow Scarves, they weren't involved in any violent acts since Horada left. They had all but disbanded since the gang war, only wearing their trademark colors and hanging out for the sake of nostalgia, and they kept in touch with their former leader when he came to them for information. There was no way they attacked other groups while they were technically inactive. He even checked with all of them and their stories held up.

If they were being framed, then who's to say the other groups haven't been framed as well?

Someone must be orchestrating this. His first instinct was Izaya, and Kida confronted him about it. But Izaya didn't look proud, nor smug. Just mildly impressed at how many people were involved. Not his work then. With Izaya fully invested on the Yodogiri case, little scuffles like these wouldn't catch his attention. That's why when Kida brought the escalation to his attention, he wasn't aware of how extensive the damage was.

It was like a large scale version of the three-way gang war from last year, except there were a LOT more gangs involved, and not only ones within Ikebukuro but the surrounding area as well. Izaya was convinced that this was Yodogiri's handiwork.

There were too many people involved, too many causalities for any of the gangs to let it slide. It was highly unlikely that they would be able to stop the inevitable war from breaking out. The best they
could do for now was prolonging it. Stopping and countering rumours, tipping off cops where a gang fight would be to dissuade a fight from breaking out. But it was a quick fix; it wouldn't stop the steady animosity growing between the gangs.

He watched Mikado walk by from his seat inside a local café. His friend passed by every day on his way home from school. It was the only time he got to see him. He was walking home with Anri as usual, but today they were accompanied with a younger boy he also recognized. Kuranuma Aoba. If the former leader of Blue Squares was trying to start something with his friend and current leader of the Dollars, he would be the first to know, and knock that little shit into next week. After all the Blue Squares have been unusually quiet through this whole thing. They had to be planning something.

But he noticed that Mikado seemed to be trying to distract himself lately, and school life seemed to be perfect diversion. He seemed more relaxed with his new kouhai. Kida watched the scene expressionlessly, though he felt conflicted. If it helped Mikado through a rough time, he will allow it. But the second he felt Mikado was in danger, he would swoop in and save him.

It wasn't the first time he simply wanted to go to his friend and be there for him. Kida shouldn't be afraid to do it, but he was. He was a coward, and he couldn't muster up the courage to do something right for once. He ran away from Saki, he ran away from Yellow Scarves, he ran away from Ikebukuro and now that he was back, he was still running away from Mikado.

"What was that 'ticket to Nirvana' crap he was talking about?" Roppi asked.

Izaya heard everything that happened in the warehouse; it made Roppi's report to him a lot easier. And he heard all the big words Yodogiri Masaru spewed out as well. He knew when he said "the face of an angel" he was referring to Celty's head. He never told Roppi about it, and kept it carefully hidden away from sight. Izaya knew his idolization of Ikebukuro's resident headless rider, and he figured if he ever found out that he had her head, and she was looking for it, he'd do something stupid. Like give it back to her.

"Nothing you should worry about. I can assure you that whatever Yodogiri wants, he's not going to get it. The only reason why he hasn't killed me yet is because he realized that without me alive, he won't be able to find what he wants. I'll take that information to my grave before letting him get a hold of it."

"I understand why you would think that, but I'm the one getting jumped at every turn. He seems pretty dead set on killing you if you ask me."

"Ahahaa…I guess that's true. He always was an annoying old fool. He should realize that I'll be a little harder to kill than that."

"Izaya."

Roppi paused and turned when he heard his current alias spoken from behind.

"Oh, Heiwajima-san…hi" he greeted awkwardly.

"Ah," Shizuo said stopping just in front of him, "You're the other Izaya right?"

Roppi inwardly panicked for a short second before he remembered what Izaya said about selling Shizuo some nonsense story about having a multiple personality disorder.

"Oh…yeah. That's right. I'm surprised you're able to tell."
"You and the flea are different, you'd have to be stupid to not catch that."

Roppi didn't think it was appropriate to mention that you'd have to be pretty thick to not catch the bullshit reeking from Izaya's 'disorder' story as well. Instead, he changed the subject, "What are you doing at this part of the city?"

"Just got off work. Our last client lives around here, just finished paying him a visit." Shizuo said. "And you're here again. What the hell do I have to do to keep you out of Ikebukuro?" he sounded more exasperated than angry.

"Maybe you should visit Shinjuku so I don't have to keep coming here to see you." Roppi said lightly in a sarcastic manner. He himself didn't know what would keep himself and Izaya out of Ikebukuro permanently. All the action was here for the two of them. Izaya's wonderful humans and Roppi's extraordinary monsters.

Shizuo stiffened and turned away, "Fuckin' shameless."

"…?" Roppi regarded the blond beast oddly, wondering why he was suddenly discomforted.

Shizuo spoke after a long moment, "The flea said you two are separate. You have separate memories and stuff. But I asked some people, and they said the alternate personalities or whatever are still a part of the person. So does that mean you two have the same thoughts, and feelings?"

Roppi was a little taken aback that he actually consulted a third party about 'their case', but he figured that anyone would be interested after hearing such a story.

"Share…the same feelings? I don't think we do…or I'm not sure. Why do you ask?"

"Ah no, I want to know what goes in that guy's head. Best chance of finding out is probably by asking you."

Roppi nodded, "I see. Well, I might not share the same thoughts and feelings as him, but I kind of get what he's thinking most of the time. Whenever you're wondering about him, you can ask me."

"I wasn't wondering about him. I was just curious what he thinks about…stuff."

Roppi wondered why he felt dismayed when he heard Shizuo say that. He should have found it humorous that both Shizuo and Izaya showed the same amount of interest of each other, but both had such trouble dealing with each other directly. He should have found it funny, but he didn't, it just bothered him for some reason.

He felt Shizuo's gaze on him and looked over. But Shizuo wasn't focusing on Roppi, but his arm instead, "You're bleeding"

Roppi followed Shizuo's gaze to the spot just below his shoulder. "Oh…right." He forgot about that bullet that clipped him during the fight earlier. The bullet grazed him, rather deeply however, it tore through his jacket and his flesh. At least the pellet wasn't in his arm. The wound was still bleeding sluggishly. It felt numb until Shizuo brought it up, then he could feel it throbbing slightly.

Shizuo frowned, "What happened?"

"It's nothing. just some business."

A growl, "You and your shitty business. You're going to get yourself killed one day. Is it even worth risking your life for whatever the hell you're doing?"
"I'll get killed quicker if I didn't get involved." He shrugged dismissively.

Shizuo gave him an unreadable look, "What's that supposed to mean?"

"Do you remember when I got shot a month ago? I guess you can say the guy who ordered it is still after my life."

Shizuo leaned back into his seat further looking up at the sky, "Not that I don't understand the feeling, but why does he want you dead so badly?"

As if sensing Roppi wouldn't know the answer, Izaya supplied the answer, "We've been stepping on each other's toes since we're both informants operating in similar circles. He's probablyfed up with my interference with his plans."

Roppi nearly yelped in surprise when he spoke. This time he really had forgotten that Izaya was still on the line. He was beyond impressed Orihara-motor mouth-Izaya hadn't said a word this whole time, especially since he was the main topic. He was probably curious what Shizuo had to say about him and quietly listened. Like he said, equally interested.

Keeping his agitation under wraps, he replied, "H-He's an informant as well. We've been stepping on each other's toes for years. But he has something big planned now, and wants to keep me out of his way permanently."

"Something big?"

"A war, by the sounds of it. And apparently I have the power to mess it all up"

Roppi parroted what Izaya said.

"It's dangerous going along with it. This war he's planning, how many people are going to be involved? How many people will get hurt and die? Did you think of that? Why would you get involved in the first place?"

"Cuz it's interesting~"

Was Izaya trying to piss him off on purpose? Of course he was, it was Izaya's favourite hobby after all. But Roppi knew that Izaya was trying hard to stop Yodogiri. He's been slowing unraveling his web of influence behind his back to set him back a few paces, and to keep civilians out of his battles. It's true that Izaya was interested in the war, but he wasn't interested in seeing people getting hurt.

"We-I'm going to stop him before that happens. And I can't get out of this even if I wanted to. I got the best chance to beat this asshole, so I will."

"...what the hell are you telling him? Stop that!" Izaya hissed on the line. He could play villain if he wanted, but Roppi knew who the greater evil was, and if Shizuo saw that and supported their side, it would be a big boost (for him at least).

There was a prolonged silence from Shizuo. "Is that your words or his?"

"It's Izaya's actions I'm putting into words. I'm helping him because I believe he can do it. He may not act like it, but he has a heart too. Even though he likes disorder, he doesn't like destruction. So he's risking his life to stop this guy."

"Roppi you-!"
"He's also dishonest with his feelings, I'm sure he'd be happy if you supported him too."

"...I hate you."

Ignoring Izaya's indignant muttering, he watched the blond fortissimo's reaction. Shizuo's looked extremely conflicted. His cheeks were red and his eyebrows were scrunched as he struggled to decide how to respond or feel.

"...I guess I can help him if he's going to fight whoever this guy is. He sounds more annoying than the flea anyway" he muttered after a while.

Roppi felt strangely accomplished after hearing that, "That's all I ask for. We'll be looking forward to working with you then."

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**CHATROOM**

Shitei-ken: And he agreed? That's incredible how you managed to convince him! Especially since he hated your friend before.

Hachimen: Yeah, I was surprised. But I feel they've turned their relationship around.

Hachimen: You should have seen him when he came home the day that guy pretty much said he was setting their differences aside. He was practically bouncing off the walls.

Shitei-ken: Lol! So what kind of person is he? This guy you really respect?

Hachimen: He's a good guy. He's really strong too, it's amazing what he can do with his power alone. But he has a calm, peaceful side too which is nice. I can tell he tries his best at everything he does. He has to, since he has a short temper, but still manages to keep it under control. I can't help but to respect him.

Shitei-ken: He really does sound like a great guy, you must be thrilled that those two are getting along

Hachimen: ...I don't know about that

Shitei-ken: What do you mean?

Hachimen: I don't even know. I should be happy, but it buggs me for some reason. I don't know why, I even convinced one to help out the other. But when I look at them it feels like those two are in their own world, and I can't reach them. It's irritating.

Shitei-ken:...could it be that Hachimen-san likes that person, that's why you feel like this?

Hachimen: What? No! Stop asking me shit like that idiot! It's not like that at all!

Shitei-ken: I've felt like that before too. The way your friend talks about him, it makes you feel uneasy right? Painful? And you really respect that person. You're happy when their around and when you talk with them. But when they talk about someone else, it feels suffocating.

Hachimen:...I don't know...maybe.

Shitei-ken: It's okay Roppi-san, the feeling is just temporary. It'll work out somehow. I guarantee it.

Hachimen: Huh?
Shitei-ken: Oh, well I can't read the future, but you're a good person, and you deserve to be happy, it'll all work out in the end.

Hachimen: No, that's not it, you called me "Roppi-san" just now didn't you?

Shitei-ken: Eh?

Shitei-ken: No! I didn't! It must be your imagination!

Hachimen: No…scroll up, you definitely said it.

Hachimen: How do you know that name?

Shitei-ken: Umm, that's….I…

Hachimen: Who are you? Have we met in person?

Shitei-ken: It's really getting late, I need to go

Hachimen: Wait!

-Shitei-ken left the chat-

Roppi stared at his phone, bewildered and confused. There was a handful of people who knew his real name, and by now, he figured what their online aliases were. But he had no idea who Shitei-ken was, or why he knew his name. Not a clue. There is no way he should know that name. There's no way anyone should know that name.

Another informant?

He clutched his phone with sudden apprehension. 'Could he be connected with Yodogiri? What have I told him? How much does he know?'

He thought back to how frequently they've spoken daily, could it be possible for him to trace him with his phone's GPS signal? Could he have somehow bugged this phone?

With a sinking realization, Roppi remembered that image he sent him, that file could've had some sort of spyware virus attached to it. How could he have been so stupid?

This was a serious problem. He had to tell Izaya that their secret has been leaked. He's going to be furious.

"Empty your pockets. Now."

Roppi hung his head as he complied with the request, he couldn't look at Izaya without feeling guilty. His foolishness was what got both of them into this difficult position. He could hear the disappointment in Izaya's tone. It was like he was saying: I expected more from you. You should have known better.

He turned over his wallet, cellphone, a few business cards and his knife.

"And your jacket too."

"…seriously?" Roppi asked incredulously. Izaya just lifted an expectant brow. Roppi sighed in response and removed his jacket, "Here. What's this all about? Isn't it just the phone that's bugged?"
Izaya turned his attention to the rest of the items on his desk, "It's called being thorough. That may not be the only thing that's been bugged. Until I've confirmed that all of these things are clear of bugs, you'll be using my things instead."

He was ashamed. They were already at a disadvantage, and this was probably why. Even though he managed to get Shizuo on their movement against Yodogiri, this certainly thwarted that effort.

Izaya busied himself with Roppi's phone, scrolling through conversations, then pausing to enter something into his laptop, and going back to the phone.

He continued that cycle for a minute or two before Roppi spoke up.

"What are you going to do about Masaru's challenge? I'm sure his goal is to kill you and take that thing he was talking about if you decide to bring it."

"He might just do that whether or not I bring it. I'm sure it would save them the hassle in the long run, he'd probably enjoy it too after all the trouble I've caused him and his father. People tend to hate me when I mean well"

Roppi bit the inside of his cheek. He didn't like the way he was talking about this whole situation. It was dangerous for him, and he could die, yet he was joking about the whole thing. It was like he didn't care either way. "Aren't you afraid? That he might be able to kill you?"

"Heeh, who do you think you're talking to~?" Izaya smirked devilishly, "I'm not so easily frightened if you haven't noticed."

"Well I'm scared…"

Izaya looked visibly surprised at his declaration, or maybe at how seriously he said it. "Is that so? I'm shocked, the boy who survived two bullets in the chest is afraid that the big scary informant. You think he'd manage to kill you when an entire squad of yakuza couldn't?"

"That's not it. I'm scared for you."

That declaration shocked him more.

Roppi looked at him angrily, "You're not even the least bit worried that he's after your life, and here you are joking about it. Did you ever think how I'd feel if something happened to you?"

Izaya didn't know what to say to that. But started with the obvious, "Roppi, I'm not worried because I know I can handle it. I'm not trying to throw my life away. This is a battle of wit, whoever can outsmart the other wins, I'm fairly comfortable with that kind of battle, so I'm not intimidated and I'm not going to lose."

Roppi's glare sharpened, "Send me. I'll go for you."

"That's not exactly the plan Roppi-"

"What if he manages to outsmart you? What if he cheats and you get caught? I have a better chance to survive in that situation, so I should go."

"I agree, but I'm not going to hide either. If we're going to beat Yodogiri, we're going to hit him where it hurts."

A sound caught his attention from his laptop. Izaya's eyes locked onto the screen, and he quickly
jotted something down on a paper. He handed it to Roppi. "Here. Go to this address."

"What's this?"

"This is where your 'Shitei-ken' has been messaging you from."

Roppi's eyes bugged out. "How did you get this so quickly?"

Izaya smirked proudly, "I have my sources. All I needed was his chat name and they did their magic. They double checked for proxies, and older chat log information. The signal always came back to the same location."

Izaya took out his phone and began rapidly texting, "Go find out whoever this is, and question him. Anyone connected with Yodogiri is useful to us. I'm sending some guys to watch and scout out the place beforehand in case he tries to run or it turns out to be a trap. But go now before he finds out we know where he is."

Roppi shifted uncomfortably, eyes darting to his coat. "Can I take my jacket?"

"No, I haven't checked it for bugs yet. Take mine." Izaya tossed the cellphone in his hand as well, "Take this too. If you run into any trouble you can't handle, those guys nearby will be on standby. They're called the Dragon Zombie gang and their numbers are in the most recent group message, text them where to be and they'll be there."

Roppi checked the phone before nodding to Izaya, "Alright, I'll be leaving now."

He went over to the closet and retrieved Izaya's trademark fur-trimmed coat. That's when he called out to him again.

"Hey…Roppi. Be careful, alright? Don't do anything too reckless."

Roppi slipped into his 'Izaya' façade and smirked, mirroring his earlier confident declaration. "Heeh, who do you think you're talking to~?"

With that being said, he swung on Izaya's coat over his shoulders and left.

Izaya chuckled at his dramatic exit, "Brat…"
Roppi sets out to find out who this mysterious "Shitei-ken" is and hopefully get one step closer to cornering and catching the elusive Yodogiri Jinnai. But things take an unexpected turn.

-Kanra has joined the chat-

Shitei-ken: Oh, hello. This is unexpected.

Kanra: Hiyaa! Sorry for the intrusion~

Shitei-ken: Not at all.

Shitei-ken: Hachimen-san has mentioned you several times, but this is the first time we're speaking isn't it? Nice to meet you.

Kanra: Nice to meet you! So well-mannered aren't you (≧▽≦)/

Shitei-ken: I'm assuming since you're contacting me, I'm in trouble, or Hachimen-san sent you to tell me that he will no longer speak with me?

Kanra: Ehhh, that's quite an assumption. But no, Hachi-chan never said anything about cutting you out of his life just yet~. Though, he's reaaaally pissed.

Kanra: I just came on my own accord to meet the guy who made him mad.

Shitei-ken: I'm relieved...but I feel bad that I pissed him off...

Kanra: I wouldn't worry about it-

Shitei-ken: You sound so sure...

Kanra: Well, I do know him very well after all! We're like suuuuper close!

Shitei-ken: I see. You two are roommates aren't you? I remember Hachimen-san said something about that. Do you two get along well?

Kanra: Hmm, it was rough at first, but we worked out our differences. He's really amusing you know! Always surprising me!

Kanra: Honestly, when you think that guy doesn't care about anything, he turns around and proves me wrong. He gets hot-headed, and flustered easily now, and he puts himself in dangerous situations for other people's sake.

Kanra: Like what's up with that? It's like he's playing 'hero' right?

Kanra: But he's a total tsundere about it!
Shitei-ken: Lol, that sounds like Hachimen-san…

Shitei-ken: I'm surprised. To be honest, I wasn't expecting you to answer that question so openly.

Kanra: Because I'm positive you won't go telling anyone else. Or you won't get the chance to.

Shitei-ken: Eh?

Kanra: Iyaa, but Hachimen-san is really usually cold isn't he?

Kanra: He hates talking to people sometimes! It's a real wonder that he managed to open up to you! What's your secret?

Shitei-ken: Well…that's...I don't know actually...I was quite shocked myself. I thought it would be harder.

Shitei-ken: After all, Hachimen-san is only interested in 'monsters' as he calls them.

Shitei-ken: May I ask you something? Do you know why Hachimen-san admires Heiwajima-san so much?

Kanra: Eh? What's this all of a sudden? Such a gross chance of subject, bleeeeh!

Shitei-ken: Hachimen-san was right, you do sound like a jealous lover.

Kanra: Hey now, is that something you say when we just met. Say things like that and I'll get mad you bastard ((っ_っ*))

Shitei-ken: So you don't think of Heiwajima-san like that?

Kanra: What do you think!?

Shitei-ken: You're not denying it Kanra-san lol

Kanra: You…think whatever you want, it doesn't matter to me.

Kanra: So…? Why suddenly ask about why Hachi-chan likes that guy?

Shitei-ken: I've been talking with him for a long time. And I've come to realize that Hachimen-san is drawn to beings that are beyond human, because he feels he doesn't fit in with other humans. He finds solstice in the existence of these beings.

Shitei-ken: It's a bad habit of his, to not want to speak with others, he's closed himself off off. Except when he chats online. This is the only way he seems to talk with other humans. This is a place it's almost disconnected from the actual person and he can't get hurt. I think that's why he feels safer here.

Shitei-ken: It's a trait of his that can't be helped, but I know he'll be able to get past it. He has a good heart, he's just confused about how he feels about others. I can tell.

Kanra: Heeeeh, you pay a lot of attention to Hachi-chan. Uwahh, this is bad isn't it?

Kanra: What are you planning on doing with this information, Stalker-san?

Shitei-ken: S-Stalker?
Kanra: Don't tell me, you're trying to influence Hachi-chan by getting on his good side?

Shitei-ken: Kanra-san, you won't gain anything by wheedling information out of me, if that's what you are looking for.

Kanra: Ooh, I'm not interested in anything like that silly! (^_^)

Shitei-ken: …then what is it?

Kanra: I guess you can say I'm keeping you still, so to speak (° ^ . )ﾉ☆

Shitei-ken:…keeping me still?

The building wasn't what he expected. It was a moderate, unassuming apartment unit. The brown doors of both the first and second floor were neatly lined up, only a bit far from each other, indicating the apartments themselves weren't that big. The third door from the right, that was the place. It's not like he was expecting a dark imposing structure with a sign saying "Yodogiri's Secret Hideout" or anything, but Roppi couldn't imagine their enemy living in such a plain place. He seemed like the type to buy a place that was twice the size of Izaya's, just to prove a point.

Shitei-ken was probably a subordinate then. Roppi was disappointed, he wished it really was that snakes house, just so he could properly 'thank' him for all the trouble he's been causing. But of course, finding the most wanted criminal in the underground society wouldn't be this easy.

He met up with the Dragon Zombie members a few minutes prior. They were pretty reliable. Three minutes after Izaya gave them the order, they had already stationed a few eyes on the apartment door. When Roppi joined them, several of them had inconspicuously assembled in the area; they informed him that nobody left the apartment, and before he came, they also had one of their own go up to listen from the door to confirm someone was inside.

Perfect. Either he didn't expect to be found this quickly, or he didn't expect to be tracked at all. Either way, he was foolish, or overconfident. He liked his odds against that kind of opponent.

One of the thugs spoke up, "Do you want one of us to accompany you Orihara-san? You might need the backup, you'll never know what you'll run into up there."

Roppi waved his hand in dismissal, "No need. I'd rather you all surround the place, in case he tries to run. Stay alert, and catch him if that happens. I'll contact you if he gets away from me." He turned his gaze up to the sending landing where their target's door was. "Your priority is to catch him. If anything happens to me, forget me and hunt him down, got it?"

He wouldn't die from a little scuffle, whatever he'd run into, he was built to take it and walk away with his life intact. So he wanted to be sure these guys wouldn't get their priorities mixed up and try to save him, and grab the target in the case he became incapacitated.

The men exchanged glances, even with their faces half covered, they could read what their partners were thinking.

They nodded together, agreeing to his instructions.

Roppi took a silent breath and left the group.

Orihara Izaya, reborn!
Orihara Izaya: Tsukumoya, about that picture I sent you. Did you look into it?

Tsukumoya: Ah, no greeting? So cold.

Tsukumoya: But yes, I have. I'm surprised you managed to get a picture of this guy, he's a super rare one! Only second to me of course, ha ha.

Tsukumoya: You were right on the money. He was Yodogiri's right hand man, his loyal guard that has never left his side.

Tsukumoya: His name is Akiyama Shin. They say he swore his life to the Yodogiri name, kinda sounds like an old samurai legend doesn't it?

Orihara Izaya: Hmm. So I was right. But for some reason, this loyal lapdog moves without his master now. I wonder why?

Orihara Izaya: So many interesting developments~ I wonder how they'll unfold.

Tsukumoya: Chaotically! Then it'll revert back to peace, right? That's the law of this city after all.

Orihara Izaya: We can agree on that at least

Orihara Izaya: Is Shitei-ken still in the same place? I'm chatting with him right now to keep tabs on him. But I want to make sure.

Tsukumoya: Yeah, his signal is at the same place. It looks like your kage bunshin is closing in as well.

Tsukumoya: But, just thought you should know about the location you sent him to. You know who lives there right?

Orihara Izaya: …?

Tsukumoya: You didn't even look at it twice did you? Geez, what kind of informant are you? So careless!

Orihara Izaya: Wait isn't this...

Orihara Izaya: Damn...was I tricked?

Orihara Izaya: You said it was the right address!

Tsukumoya: I said it was the right address for Shitei-ken, you simply assumed things about who he is. Though, I can't say if he is or isn't related with Yodogiri with 100% certainty either. They've worked together in the past after all.

Orihara Izaya: Shit...what the hell is going on?

Roppi approached the door, he glanced over his shoulder to the parking lot below. The Dragon Zombie gang was spread out discreetly. The late afternoon shadows hid them well. There were two more members that stood at the other end of the floor, they stood there waiting in case they were needed. When they noticed Roppi, they gave him a nod and went around the corner, out of sight.

He turned to the door when something caught him off guard.
"ROPPI-KUUUUN!"

Roppi froze when he heard someone’s voice, a familiar voice, call his real name.

Face pale and throat dry, he turned toward the sound of rapidly clacking heels, which sounded like they had no intention of slowing down, approaching him from his side.

He caught sight of a mop of light blond hair before he felt a body collide into him in a bone crushing hug.

"Oof-Emilia?! What are you doing here? And don't say that name so loudly!" he hissed trying to shove the overly affectionate woman off of him, hoping nobody heard her.

"Speak with respect to Mama, Roppi-kun" she chided at a more appropriate decibel, "As for the reason for my attendance; my dwelling is the one you stand before! Hypothesis based on the available data of your sudden appearance…possibly, you have come to visit Mama and Papa? The joy fills my chest like a thousand butterflies during mating season of late spring!"

Roppi felt the rest of her nonsensical speech fade out into white noise.

'Wait…what? Hold on….what? This is her house? How is that possible? Shitei-ken was traced to this apartment! Does this mean Shitei-ken isn't connected with Yodogiri Jinnai? Or does this mean Emilia is connected with Yodogiri?'

Roppi's confusion and new revelations swirled around his head. He tried to make sense of this new twist.

'But more importantly…!' He snapped out of his thoughts as he realized in alarm Emilia was pounding at the door as she yelled that Roppi had come to visit.

Emilia's surprisingly strong grip stopped him from running right then and there. Though Roppi was still stunned by how this whole situation turned out to run anyway. He knew who was coming, and he couldn't do anything about it.

The door opened.

A familiar figure answered the door, all white and bright from his lab coat to his gas mask.

"Well I'll be damned. The prodigal son has returned."

Roppi closed his eyes in annoyance which seem to bud as soon as he heard that muffled baritone, "Hello to you too, Shingen."

It's been a few months since he's last seen the old doctor, but in his opinion it hasn't been long enough.

Roppi finally managed to pull his arm from Emilia's grip, "I have a couple of questions for the two of you if you don't mind."

Emilia and Shingen looked at each other.

"Why not? It's not every day an ungrateful brat comes crawling back to his loving caretakers! I wouldn't mind capitalizing on this rare blessing." Shingen said, "Come in."

Resisting the urge to punch the man, he entered the apartment.
He followed Shingen to the living room. It appeared as if Shingen was working on his laptop. He reached for it and closed it as they all sat.

Roppi eyed it suspiciously.

"Have either of you been contacting me through an online chatroom?"

Shingen laughed. "I have no time for such things. Maybe I'll consider it in the future. I have seen neither hide or hair from you since that day you ran off, I've been wondering how you were doing. Keeping tabs on you would make the process easier."

Roppi groaned. Did he come here for nothing? Izaya said he was sure this was the right place. So he did fool Izaya after all. He fished out his cellphone and notified the group outside that their help was not needed, and dismissed them. He also notified Izaya of the situation. 'So was this his idea of a joke? Sending him to Shingen who's the last person I'd want to see?'

The color drained from his face. If that was true, then Yodogiri knew more about him than he was comfortable with. His ties with Shingen and Emilia, his resentment towards them, then could it be that he knew what he was too? Was sending him here a message that he knew?

Shingen cleared his throat, "You're looking a little pale there boy. Is that really why you came here? To ask us if we're caught up with the new social media? I'm glad our cute little son is trying to keep his Papa and Mama in the loop."

Roppi shot him an unimpressed look, leave it to Shingen to break a serious mood, "Actually, I didn't know you two lived here. I was under the impression this was a place linked to Yodogiri Jinnai or one of his associates."

Shingen stilled, "...and why, pray tell, are you looking for that man, or his associates?"

"It's come to my attention that Yodogiri Jinnai knows my identity, and is possibly after my life."

The aura around Shingen darkened. "Why? Why is he after your life? More importantly, how do you know that man? How does he know you?"

"I don't know...I was hoping you'd be able to tell me. You two, Izaya and his two assistants, Shinra and Celty are the only ones who know my real name. Everyone else calls me Izaya because I've been using his identity as a cover. But he called me by my real name."

Emilia had a worried frown on her lips, "How can such knowledge come from that man?"

Shingen growled, "This is why I told you not to get involved with Izaya and his business. He's too naïve, that boy knows nothing of the dangers that come hand in hand with Yodogiri. Yet he continues to play around with matters he thinks he has control over. Yodogiri Jinnai is not some pushover. When you think you're a step ahead of him, you turn around and realize he has you in a checkmate."

Roppi's eyes studied Shingen, "You sound like you know more than what you're saying."

"Izaya's got you talking like him too," The old doctor scoffed, "Yes, I know that man. I got involved with him years ago. A mistake I'll never make again. He's more cunning and sneaky that you'll ever know. He probably has both of you playing into his hands without you realizing. He's like toxic radioactive waste, that man. Anyone who gets too close to him will rot away and die. I cut ties with him as soon as I saw many of the people I've worked with slowly go insane, or suddenly snap. Twisting their minds slowly or quickly, both are within his capabilities. It's disgusting how he could
control people to that point. Playing with people, pushing them to their deaths is amusing to him and he's good at it."

"Shinigami." Emilia muttered, not sounding like her usual chipper self.

Roppi's eyes went back and forth between the two. He felt even more apprehension with their enemy, but also more conviction to find him and getting rid of such scum. That's why he needed more information and help, so he could find him quicker. "He plans to use the weapon created by Nebula. He's employing the help of the Asuki group to attack the Awakusu-kai and capture the weapon."

Shingen and Emilia exchanged looks.

"That weapon must never fall into his hands Roppi. Do you understand?" Shingen said sternly.

"You think I don't know that?" Roppi sighed, "But what is it? Why does he want it in the first place?"

"Who knows. But knowing that guy, he has something big planned, and whatever it is, it's nothing good. That weapon is one of mass destruction. It's a specially made thermonuclear bomb with eight chambers. Each chamber has an energy source that fuels the explosion and adds to its size. Normal ones usually have four chambers, but some morons decided to stick on twice as many on there. Honestly, I don't know what the higher-ups were thinking, giving a project like this a green light. Those guys have always been chasing the road to immortality, suddenly they're interested in the mortality of hundreds of thousands of lives."

"In searching for life they investigate death. Most twisted of methods. This perversion, could it be...perverted?" Emilia wondered. Roppi gave her an odd look.

"In any case," Shingen continued, "Yodogiri could probably hold the entire city hostage with that thing, hell he might even set it off if he felt like it. I'm warning you, keep a close eye on that weapon, better yet dismantle the thing while you have the chance. He'll steal it right from under your nose. You won't even see him coming."

"I'd be inclined to believe you, but he's been reckless recently. Even Izaya thinks so. It's easy to spot his men, and he's not even trying to cover his tracks. It doesn't seem like the guy you're describing to me."

Shingen clenched his fists, "You can't let your guard down. Don't you think it's strange that he's suddenly so easy to read?"

The younger male paused in thought. Could he be feigning his carelessness to reel them in? It was a plausible argument.

"But that doesn't mean we should back down. He's out to kill us, it's in our best interests to strike before he does."

"He's out to kill Izaya. You have nothing to do with it." Shingen shot back, crossing his arms in a show of stubbornness on the topic. He was against the two of them working together from the beginning after all.

"I got shot because of him. And he's been sending men after me ever since. I think it's safe to say that I'm involved now."

"That what I'm telling you, it's Izaya he's trying to kill, not you. If you drop the whole Izaya act and
stay hidden and safe this wouldn't be your problem anymore."

"Like hell I can do that! I'd rather get killed than go back to that life again. Besides, I've learned a lot more than I would've hidden in a lab or an equivalent. Survival skills that you learn in practical situations."

Shingen scoffed, "I'm sure Izaya has taught you many a great thing. Useful tips of being his personal meat shield."

"He's not like that." Roppi snarled. "You don't know him like I do."

"You're foolishly tossing your life away, why can't you understand that? I ought to take you back from all this rubbish and teach you how to value your life and do something more meaningful than act as cannon fodder!" Shingen yelled, a rare display of anger.

"Will you stop talking like have any say in what I do in my life?" Roppi raised his voice as well.

"Yes of course I do! I raised you for goodness sake! You're my responsibility, and in the end, I know what's best for you! And I forbid you from pursuing Yodogiri any further!"

Roppi slammed his hands on the table "YOU ARE NOT MY FATHER!"

Shingen teetered back as if Roppi had physically struck him. The silence that followed the outburst was heavy. Even with his face concealed, the old doctor's Adams apple bobbed as he swallowed thickly, and he released a shuttering breath. It was plain to see Roppi's words cut him deeply. And immediately, Roppi felt guilt prickling within him. He didn't even know why. Shingen was always a royal pain in the ass for him. Yet seeing him so hurt by his words, simple words that shouldn't have meant anything, it hurt him as well.

Shingen was just worried about him. It surprised him when he realized this. Not once did Shingen mention that he was 'created to survive' or 'a part of his precious research' like he usually did. Did that mean Shingen was looking past that and seeing Roppi as a person? How long has it been since he convinced himself that Shingen never cared for him? A small spark of hope rekindled itself within Roppi, no matter how much he tried to quell it; he didn't want to get his hopes up for fear that he would get hurt again.

Emilia cleared her throat nervously looking to diffuse the tense atmosphere, "Thenceforth, what plan of action is to follow?"

"Right now…” Roppi remembered why he ended up here in the first place, "I need to find that goon that's been tracking me. He's been chatting with me for some time now, and I had no idea."

"Your hypothesis is confirmed the one to speak with you is Yodogiri's ally?"

"I'm sure of it. I've been followed and ambushed by Asuki-kai members since he sent me a file, using the chat handle Shitei-ken. Izaya and I suspect it was a bug."

Emilia's eyes widened a fraction. And then she started giggling.

Both Roppi and Shingen looked over at her in confusion.

"Shitei-ken?" She wiped a tear from the corner of her eye, "And the assumption is you traced Shitei-ken to this apartment, correct?"
Briefly taken aback, Roppi nodded. "Yeah…that's right."

Emilia clapped her hands together, "Then worrying is proven useless! The chat buddy's identity is confirmed an ally!"

Roppi looked between Shingen and Emilia (the former still seemed slightly lost), "Are you saying you are Shitei-ken?"

Emilia shook her head, her blond locks bouncing playfully, "Incorrect! There is an additional member in the Kishitani residence!"

At this Shingen finally seemed to catch on, "So that's what he does on his spare time? Hmph, he could've told me he was keeping in touch with Roppi-kun…"

"Who-?"

Before Roppi could finish asking, Emilia yanked him up and towards the rooms down the hall (he marveled at the strength such a tiny woman was capable of), with Shingen trailing after them in amusement. She stopped at a door and rapped her small knuckles against the wood.

Shingen laughed to himself, shaking his head, "It was only him, huh? I was worried for a minute that you really got yourself into trouble."

Roppi was starting to feel nervous all of a sudden.

They say Shitei-ken was an ally.

He was someone that stayed with Shigen and Emilia.

This ally knew his real name and spoke with him like an old friend.

It couldn't be…

Could it...?

A friend he missed dearly in the months they've been apart. His absence was what drove him to run from Shingen's lab in the first place. The friend that he shared all his true thoughts and desires with, and he sat quietly and listened to him.

"Oh my little Honey-Moon! A surprising visitor suddenly appears requesting your approval to enter your quarters!"

A barely audible reply sounded back, asking her to come in.

She opened the door.

Shitei-ken: …keeping me still?

Shitei-ken: I don't really get it Kanra-san, but I never go anywhere anyway, haha.

The room wasn't exactly a normal bedroom. Its walls were lined up with small machines that held glass jars and weird pieces of unidentifiable fleshy objects in them. There was also an operating bed shoved off into the corner, a few brown packages sat strewn on top of it. It was probably a spare bed left in here for storage.
But Roppi wasn't concerned about that. His eyes focused on the only table in the room, or more so what was on it. A glass case containing a synthetic silicon brain connected to wires and cords that in turn was connected to a computer. It was a familiar set up, the camera, the microphone, the sensor pad. But there were two differences, there were now speakers, and a monitor. And on the monitor was an image of Heiwajima Shizuo looking at him in surprise.

Roppi stood rooted on the spot. He was unprepared coming to this apartment to reunite with his friend, but even more unprepared to see Shizuo's face when he walked into this room.

[R-Roppi-san?!] Shizuo squeaked in a digitized voice.

And he was not expecting that kind of timid reaction either.

Roppi's mouth opened and closed like a gaping fish. So many confusing things happened within the last hour, his mind was having trouble keeping up with everything.

Emilia and Shingen snickered behind him, "Well, we'll leave you two alone to get reacquainted."

It was quiet in the room for a few minutes. The image of Heiwajima Shizuo shifted uncomfortably under Roppi's watchful gaze.

"You...you're the...?" Roppi started, pointing to the brain in the glass case.

A shy nod was his response. [...] Yes, I'm the secondary brain Kishitani-sensei created to develop the Plan-B function. I can talk, and I have a 'body' now. Emilia added a speech function so that I can talk, and she developed a program where I can take a corporeal form. It's amazing, I don't feel nearly as disembodied anymore. He lifted both hands and flexed his fingers, smiling happily as he watched them move, as if the simple gesture brought him joy.

Roppi closed his mouth and nodded. He seemed to have calmed down a bit, and approached the table.

"Any particular reason you chose that appearance?" Roppi asked as he took a seat in front of the monitor. That was another thing, it still bothered him to see the great fortissimo of Ikebukuro fidgeting and stuttering.

His eyes widened, [Uh...well, I thought it would be cool.] He wasn't going to admit he wanted to look like the guy Roppi was always interested in. [And, Kishitani-sensei is making a body for me from Heiwajima Shizuo's stem cells. I thought I might was well get used to looking like this.]

"I see," Roppi said, still trying to process what was happening. When the hell did that doctor manage to obtain a sample from Shizuo anyway?

The boy in the monitor looked away, visibly distressed. 'I didn't want our first meeting to be this awkward. I'm not mentally prepared to see Roppi-san so suddenly, I must be saying so many weird things if Roppi-san is being this quiet."

"And your name?"

He looked up, [Huh..?] 

"Your name? You have one, right? Or should I call you 'Honey-Moon' like Emilia does?" Roppi smirked.

[No, please don't!] The blond flushed, [M-My name is Tsukishima...or Tsuki is fine.]
Roppi smiled warmly like the times he always did when he was with him back in the American labs. "Nice to finally meet you, Tsuki."

Tsuki's eyes widened and he returned his smile with just as much warmth.

Izaya sat in his apartment, turning Roppi's phone over in his hands. He received a text earlier updating him on the situation.

Without Shitei-ken as a possible suspect, that left a gaping hole in how Roppi was tracked. He wasn’t able to find any type of tracking devices or spyware on his phone. He checked all over Roppi’s jacket and wallet for bugs as well and came up with nothing. He even inspected his knife, nothing suspicious there.

So that left the question, how was Yodogiri able to track Roppi’s movements?

Izaya picked up Roppi’s collection of business cards and began distractedly thumbing through them. Finally giving into his irritation, he sank back into the couch, and tossed the cards in the air one by one as he began verbally tossing around more ideas.

"The only explanation is that there is a tracking device on his body somewhere…but how? Somehow get him to ingest a tracking chip? No it wouldn't remain in his system for that long. The bullets he was shot with? Is that even possi-?"

Izaya paused at a particular card with a phone number written on it, and a playful winking face drawn next to it. The card was unusually thick and heavy. He turned it, looking at the card from the side. There was a barely distinct bulge in the center.

"You're kidding…"

He tore the card without hesitation. A thin, coin-sized chip fell out from inside and landed on his lap. Calmly, Izaya picked it up.

Laughing in disbelief, he remembered Roppi's recounting of the waitress Rokujo Aya and how she 'happened' to bump into him and ended up passing on her card to Roppi. At the time, he didn't think twice about her case, he even laughed this incident off at Roppi's expense. She was a nobody, someone not worth thinking twice about in the wake of Yodogiri Jinnai's case. But he was wrong. He underestimated how crafty their foe really was, and it allowed him to get this close to him.

"Hmm, well played. I really should stop taking him too lightly…I really might get killed one day."

"You gave me a hell of a scare do you know that? I seriously thought that Yodogiri Jinnai knew who I was! Do you have any idea how much trouble you caused?" Roppi scolded lightly, even though he was relieved that the situation was a lot less serious than what he thought it was an hour prior.

Tsuki bowed his head, [I'm really, really sorry.]

Roppi sighed, "Why didn't you tell me it was you?"

[I'm sorry. It was selfish. I wanted to see if Roppi-san really would like talking with me, since I never spoke with you before. I wanted to see if you would speak to me if you didn't know who I was. So I could be sure you weren't talking to me out of pity of my situation.]

Roppi sighed, "Well now you have the answer, I like talking to you because you're you. Happy?"
Tsuki bit his lip trying to hide a smile, [Yes?]

Roppi’s lips quirked, "Idiot"

The two of them got caught with what’s been happening since the last time they’ve seen each other. Tsuki’s story was a lot shorter, but he was content on listening to Roppi than speaking. Just like before.

Roppi told him of his first day outside, meeting the Ikebukuro legends, living with Izaya, and his current enemy, Yodogiri Jinnai. Roppi told him all the things he was able to do outside, and told him all the things he saw in Ikebukuro. He described the buildings, the streets, the sounds, everything he could so his friend could imagine the things got to see.

"I'll take pictures of the city and send them to you. That way you’ll be able to see them too."

[You’d really do that for me? I’d really appreciate it Roppi-san!]

"Yeah, then maybe we can go visit them together one day."

Tsuki’s eyes softened, [Yeah, one day. I'll definitely join Roppi-san, and you can show me all your favourite places.]

Roppi turned and looked at the jars, tubs, and apparatuses that were hooked up and no doubt fermenting the parts necessary to ‘assemble’ Tsuki’s body. "How long do you think it'll take?"

Tsuki tilted his head in thought, [Well, it's been a few months since Shingen started. According to him, it'll take maybe…four years?]

Roppi snapped his head back to look at Tsuki, "Four years?!"

Tsuki smiled uncomfortably, [I know it's a long time. That's how long your body took after all, according to Shingen. It might take the same amount of time. I'm sorry; you'll have to wait that long before we can go on our outing.]

Roppi's bangs shadowed his face, "What are you apologizing for. I'm the one who brought it up like a moron without realizing how long you'll have to wait."

Tsuki chuckled, [I'm fine Roppi-san, I'm not bothered by it. As long as I get to talk with you I'm happy. And I'll look forward to your pictures as well; it'll help me feel closer to your world.]

Tsuki smiled reassuringly, [Besides, this virtual body is more than enough for me right now. Emilia made a genetic map of all the traits I would get with the samples from Heiwajima-san. I put this virtual one together with that information so I could get an accurate idea of what my body will be like when it's done.]

Roppi smirked in amusement, "It's pretty well done. You look exactly like him."

Tsuki's smile faltered. […Hey Roppi-san, in your opinion, what is Heiwajima-san's most distinguishing feature?]

Roppi blinked at the question, but thought about it nonetheless. What feature was it that stood out the most? He imagined his angry face, his thin lips pulled into a frown, both eyebrows drawn together dangerously. And his eyes. That's one thing he remembered that struck him when he thought back to his first meeting with Shizuo. His amber orbs that seemed to be constantly ablaze. His eyes that seared anyone he looked at.
"Like liquid fire."

"His eyes…I guess" Roppi mused.

Tsuki nodded and closed his eyes. When he opened them again, his eyes were no longer amber, but crimson.

"Wha-?" Roppi gawked at the sight, "You can change your appearance?"

Tsuki scratched his cheek in embarrassment, *It takes a bit of concentration, especially establishing my form and already have gotten comfortable with it. But yes, I can change it if I can imagine it. And the same goes for my environment. Emilia created the program so I have full control of it.*

Roppi frowned, "That's cool and all. But why did you change your eyes after I said I liked Shizuo's? Are you making fun of me?" Roppi started poking the sensor pad irritably.

Tsuki yelped as he covered his stomach, *Ah! No! I-ouch-did it because-ow-I want Roppi-san to see me when he looks at me! Not Heiwajima-san!*

The raven ceased his attack on the sensor pad.

*Besides, this the color of Roppi-san's eyes, I think they are much more beautiful anyway.*

Roppi flushed and stammered, "Wha? Y-You…Don't suddenly say embarrassing shit like that!"

Tsuki laughed warmly. *Ahh Roppi-san…he really is cute.*

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**An estate north of Ikebukuro**

A lone man walks on to the property casually, with his hands in his pockets. Two guards tense at his approach, but relax when he calls out to them.

"Yo boys! Nice night so far?"

"Yes Yodogiri-dono, it's been quiet. Yodogiri-dono is waiting for you inside."

To an outsider, this exchange would have been confusing. Referring to the person they are speaking to and the person they were speaking about with the same name. One would wonder why they didn't bother using a different title for one of them.

But there was no confusion between the two parties. The man nodded and went inside.

He navigated through the large house without much difficulty and found the room he was looking for. He opened the door, revealing a large group of people standing around a large table. There were only three figures sitting, a boy, a woman, and a man.

The man lifted his unimpressed gaze to the newcomer. The newcomer smiled, unperturbed.

"Hey there Akiyama-sa-"

"-Masaru-kun. I understand you said some unnecessary things to Orihara Izaya."

"Tch." Masaru darts his eyes to the only child in the room. The one who no doubt told the boss what he did. The boy, for his part, said nothing, he simply glared back defiantly as if he was saying *You brought this on yourself.*
Masaru shrugged it off, "What the heck, I was saving that as a surprise! Well now that that's out on the table, I can relax! Yes, I challenged Orihara Izaya, and now I'm going to kill that nobody and steal 'the head' from him. Then you all have to acknowledge me as the best! Maybe you can fork over your title, Second! Third is such a lame number to attach to such an esteemed being like myself!"

"Foolish."

Masaru forced his smile to stay in place, for he knew his place very well, "That's rough Akiyama-san. Father would've seen how well timed this plan is…"

"Your father would've seen your foolishness as well. You talk without thinking. Fourth said you mentioned his title in front of him. You may have just told him the true nature of Yodogiri Jinnai. That boy is infuriating as he is sharp. He'll catch on more quicker than I planned for."

"Well that's not going to matter when I deal with him tomorrow. I told him to bring the head, if he's stupid enough to do that, then I can kill him and take it from him."

"What if he's a no show nyan~?" said the woman he referred to as 'Second'

Masaru laughed, "I wouldn't blame him, I'm pretty intimidating after all. I doubt it though. Akiyama-san, you don't have to worry about it. I'm bringing some men from the Asuki-kai to help me take him down. The goal of tomorrow night is to fix my previous blunder and get rid of Orihara for good this time. You have my word Akiyama-san, I won't fail." The usually light-hearted male solemnly promised to his boss with a steady voice and a determined gleam in his eye.

Akiyama Shin looked at his subordinate impassively, "Fine, I'll allow it. Don't disappoint me."

It was a late hour in the evening when Roppi finally emerged from Tsuki's room.

When he returned to the living room, Shingen and Emilia were drinking coffee together in the kitchen. They looked up when they heard him approach.

Roppi cleared his throat, "He was getting tired, so I told him to rest. He didn't say anything, but his frontal lobe blinks when he's getting sleepy…"

Emilia smiled warmly, "A penny for your thoughtfulness."

Roppi looked at the ground awkwardly, "Well, I guess I'll be going…"

"Roppi...wait" Shingen spoke up.

Shingen was aware he put Roppi through a lot of stress in the past, and intentionally for the sake of the boy's advancement. He wouldn't take that back, because it helped him develop into who he was today. And Shingen was proud of who he was. But Roppi wasn't in a controlled environment anymore, he could avoid him indefinitely if he wanted. The threat that Roppi may permanently cut ties with him became very real. In the time Shingen hasn't seen Roppi, he was afraid he wouldn't see him again. So with the chance he had while his previous charge was here, he would swallow his pride and make amends if he needed to.

"Roppi, I want to say…"

"I'm sorry."
"I-wait, what was that?"

Roppi clicked his tongue in annoyance, "I didn't mean to say what I said earlier. My bad. We're...not blood, but...you're still important...or something." He mumbled the last bit.

Shingen gaped for a long moment, completely speechless for once. Emilia nudged him with her elbow.

"Ah...yes...well, I'm sorry too. You are fully capable of making your own decisions. I let my emotions get out of control and I spoke out of line."

Roppi frowned, 'Just say you're worried about me you stupid doctor.'

He simply nodded and he quickly walked towards the door. He threw one last comment before he left, "I'll come over again soon, so...see you guys later."

The door shut.

Emilia squealed. Shingen winced.

She hugged her husband in glee, "A promise of a tomorrow! Ah, parting is such sweet sorrow!"

Shingen chuckled, "I never thought he'd ever want to come back. Though, it's probably that Tsukishima who won him over."

"And have you made observations on the modifications to Roppi-kun's behaviour, with respect?"

"Ah, yes. He has been humbled to the point that he would apologize to someone as obnoxious as me. He's almost there, isn't he? To my perfect image of a human."
Catching A Snake By Its Tail

At various times on May 2nd, throughout Ikebukuro

A blond debt collector says with conviction, "I'll go out of my way to help him even if it kills me."

A Raira student stares at his upperclassmen with surprise and slight fear, "Mi-Mikado-senpai...you're kind of hurting me."

A figure who heard what happened, tells his followers, "Orihara-kun...I'll take the head he's hiding, and the one between his shoulders too."

A usually self-confident informant is cornered thinking this is the worst possible scenario. He warily prays that the violent-prone blond standing before him doesn't look over his shoulder and spots his double, who stood in plain sight frozen like a deer caught in headlights.

Today is the turning point. A day that would decide the fate of the unaware citizens of Ikebukuro. It is said that when the wheel of fate is set in motion, it can't be stopped. Where ever it lands, will determine where the players in this game we call life will go from here.

11:45, an online chatroom

-Tsukumoya Shinichi has logged in-

Tsukumoya Shinichi: Oh...what's this?

Tsukumoya Shinichi: Ah! I remember you! It's been a long time! Where have you been?

Tsukumoya Shinichi: Oh...you're probably thinking "I've been here the whole time, where have you been, you bastaaard!" or something right?

Tsukumoya Shinichi: Sorry, sorry. Lots of things have been happening you know?

Tsukumoya Shinichi: ...Hey, do you know? Some really crazy stuff went down today in Ikebukuro. I almost couldn't process it all at once.

Tsukumoya Shinichi: Shall I tell you about it?

6:00 pm, in residence at the West End of Ikebukuro

"Please, I'll have the money, I swear!"

"You're really putting me on the spot here Yamaguchi-san. You said that last week. I'm starting to think that you'll just avoid your payments indefinitely at this rate."

"I'm begging you! Another week! I haven't even gotten this week's pay yet, I can't even give you half of what I owe at the moment!" The man was on his knees at the threshold of his home. He bowed deeper at the two debt collectors until his forehead touched the ground.

Tom sighed, and looked over his shoulder at his junior, Shizuo nodded and crouched next to the man.
"Cut it out, lift your head."

He heard the man sniffle before he complied.

"Listen, Tom-san is being really lenient, pushing your deadline back for this long. Understand? He's sticking his neck out for you. So, the only decent thing to do is pay him back for his kindness."

"B-But I don't have the money, I told you already."

Shizuo closed his eyes and sighed, "There's one thing I really hate, and it's liars."

"Eh?"

Tom spoke up, "We're aware that you received your salary yesterday Yamaguchi-san, we've been keeping tabs on you."

The man's eyes widened, "I-I can explain!"

Shizuo cracked his knuckles warningly, "Make it quick."

"M-My daughter, she wants to become an artist. Her mother won't allow it, so she came to me for tuition money. That's why I took the loan out in the first place."

Tom sighed and took a step back, he knew Shizuo didn't have much patience for sob stories.

"I paid her tuition in full, but I want to buy her supplies and books, that's why I need this week's pay to cover the expenses. Please, understand! This is the first time she's come to me for help, I want to do the best I can…"

"The first time she's asked for help…huh." The blond repeated thoughtfully.

Tom glanced at Shizuo in confusion.

Yamaguchi nodded, "You know what it's like to be needed by someone important? I was so happy she came to me. I could finally do something useful." He clenched his hands on his knees, "Her mother refused to help her. No one but me. I can support her during this important time, and maybe our relationship will improve. That's why…"

"I'll go out of my way to help him even if it kills me." Shizuo finished.

Tom and Yamaguchi stared at him. Shizuo's unexpected interjection caught everyone by surprise.

"Uh…yes. Along those lines." Yamaguchi said after an extended silence.

Shizuo blinked realizing he probably said something weird, "Ah. Anyway, I get the basic idea. You want to help your daughter right? You've already paid for her classes. That's all she asked for. So pay Tom-san now and you can pay for her stuff when you get next week's salary."

"But…"

Shizuo placed a strong hand on his shoulder. "You can't buy anything for her from the hospital, and I don't like beating up nice guys. So pay Tom-san now. Please."

The man gulped, "I'll get the money."

He stood up and retreated to the other room. Behind Shizuo, Tom chuckled, "You had me going for
a while. I thought you gave in to his sob story."

Shizuo rubbed the back of his neck, "Nah, it's not about that. If he wants to be useful to his daughter, then he's gotta be smart about it. If he gets into trouble with us, then he's less useful than dirt. I knew that, he just needed to realize it too. Plus, boss would've been pissed if we came back empty handed."

Tom nodded, "Got that right."

Yamaguchi returned with an envelope. Tom took it, counted the money inside and thanked him for his business. Shizuo turned to leave with his senior, "I hope things work out with you and your daughter."

Yamaguchi nodded and closed the door.

"One more for today. Then we can head back." Tom said, checking his phone for details.

Shizuo simply nodded.

"...Say Shizuo, you seemed to be a little lost in thought for a moment back there. Want to talk about it?"

"It was nothing. Just something that was on my mind."

Tom was sharp as ever Shizuo noted. Whenever his thoughts on Izaya bothered him, he was the first to notice. This is what it was like to have a reliable senpai he supposed. It was nice to have someone there to help sort out these confusing thoughts and feelings. Still, he felt it he was bothering Tom too much about it.

When he promised he'd help Izaya out with that other information broker, it was like he went against every instinct telling him it was a stupid idea. And he felt like his brain was haunting him for it because he found himself thinking about him constantly. It was annoying in a completely different way than it did in the past. It annoyed him because he was actually looking forward to seeing that flea again. So as a result, he actually felt more annoyed with himself than anything. No...annoyance wasn't the right word for what he was feeling. He's spent so many years attributing any feeling he had for the flea to annoyance, that he didn't know what else to call this.

"Could it be about that brunch meeting you have with your brother tomorrow?"

"Huh? Oh right. Yeah that, that's it."

Tom raised his eyebrow, "I assumed that's what you were thinking about. You said you needed tomorrow off because your brother needed some help with something. Am I wrong?"

"No," Shizuo answered. He wasn't really lying, Kasuka did need a favour, and scheduled a brunch with him to discuss. "He also said something about bringing a girl."

"Oh, is he setting you up on a date?" Tom teased.

Shizuo paused, "I didn't think of it that way. In any case, I don't think Kasuka would think to set me up with someone. He has himself to worry about."

Tom nodded in understanding, "But that wouldn't be too bad right? Getting a girlfriend? You're still young, you should enjoy a couple of dates here and there. You've been too worked up recently."
It's been too long since Shizuo had even considered dating someone. He came to terms with his lack of skills to maintain any type of romantic relationships. He chalked it up to scaring people away with his reputation or violent demeanour. Maybe he'd have a chance if there was someone who wasn't afraid of him, and looked at him like he was someone who could be loved. Did someone like that exist?

Izaya's teasing smile appeared in his mind's eye. That night at Russian sushi, he remembered how Izaya looked at him. He was drunk, so he couldn't be sure he was imagining it, but he knew no one looked at him like that before. And the things he said…

'Then mess me up Shizu-chan'

Shizuo frowned as his cheeks flushed. He wondered if he was over-thinking his words, or if he really was as slow as people say he is.

"Hey old man, do you know where we can find members from the Dollars?"

Shizuo stopped walking as he noticed Tom was stopped a few paces back by a bunch of thugs in patterned trench coats.

He sighed and picked up a café signboard and strode over to them. The streets have gotten pretty dangerous lately. He couldn't get a few minutes of peace to sort out his thoughts.

1:45 pm, in an apartment in Shinjuku

Izaya was alone in his apartment. Just him and his thoughts for that afternoon. Roppi had left earlier, having a few errands to run. Izaya didn't mind. He took the time to reorganize his thoughts on the events that been going on the past few weeks. And how Roppi managed to rope Shizuo into it without his permission.

Sure, Izaya probably would have tried to drag him into the chaos anyway, but he'd rather have a proper say in how he was involved. He never imagined both of them fighting on the same side. Though it was strange enough to have anyone on his side.

For Izaya, he was never really a team player. He'd rather watch others do the fighting as he watched from the sidelines. For him, it was more fun watching the game than playing in it.

Even this ordeal between Awakusu and the Asuki-Yodogiri alliance, Izaya was meant to be a supporting figure, pulling the strings for Awakusu's victory and Yodogiri's downfall. That changed when Roppi took Yodogiri's attacks personally, and Izaya's effort to catch him as a sign that they were the main fighters in this battle. After recruiting Shizuo, it felt like they were all 'one big happy team'.

Izaya didn't know if he was more embarrassed or upset at this turn of events.

It violated his basic principles of existence. He was meant to observe others. An impartial observer. He never had any intention to engage with other people. Besides, teamwork was unknown territory for him, he was incapable of trusting people to that extent. Just the thought made him uncomfortable. So he chose to steer clear of it.

And so, he kept all his humans just beyond arm's reach. That was how he functioned as long as he could remember.

And then he met Shizuo, the incarnation of violence, a beast that dwelled in a teenager's body. He
knew he was going to be interesting. He heard rumors, but never saw his strength for himself.

Could anyone really blame him for wanting to push his buttons and see how he reacted?

Izaya was that type of guy after all. He had fun pushing the buttons of his toys and to sit back and watch what they did. But eventually, his 'toys' broke, and he would go off and find new ones.

Not Shizuo. Shizuo never broke, no matter what he did. So in response, Izaya kept pushing.

What was this? Frustration? Fascination? Fixation?

Before long, Shizuo was akin to an unhealthy obsession of his. He didn't bother to examine what he felt towards him. All that mattered was that he felt strongly about him. And as a result, he bothered Shizuo at every chance he got, because it was the only way to sate him.

Now that he thought about it, Shizuo was the only person who he'd willingly step down from his human-observing perch to engage with directly.

It was a brief moment in the past, but Izaya remembered lamenting that after all this time and effort he spent pushing Shizuo's buttons, never once did he try to push Izaya's back.

It was obvious why now. Even though to Izaya, there was only one Shizuo, in Shizuo's eyes, he was just another one of the countless annoyances in his life. Izaya just wasn't particularly special to that brute was he?

Izaya's eyes snapped up when he heard the door open.

"What a disgusting train of thought" he mumbled as Roppi came into view.

"Did you say something?" Roppi asked.

"You're late" Izaya replied without hesitation.

"Yeah, sorry. I went to visit Tsuki."

Izaya looked unimpressed, "What's the point of that? You saw him last night didn't you?"

When he got home last night, Roppi retold the events that transpired at Shingen and Emilia's apartment. It was annoying to find out the whole thing was just a big misunderstanding. But he supposed it was better that it didn't turn out to be one of Yodogiri's guys. The things Roppi told 'Shitei-ken' in the chatroom were too intimate for his liking. If that information fell into Yodogiri's hands, he'd have no trouble in getting into Roppi's head. Which would have been bad. He was currently Izaya's most valuable asset. He'd hate to lose him this far into the game.

Luckily, that wasn't the case. And on top of that, the chip Yodogiri placed on Roppi was a GPS tracker. Not a wire tap. He wasn't interested in getting into his head, but just tracking his movements. Izaya could live with that.

In any case, Izaya was content that Yodogiri didn't know more than he should have. And Roppi seemed in higher spirits now that he reunited with his little friend. Two visits within 24 hours was a bit much though.

Roppi shrugged, "Tsuki hardly gets out, or has any visitors, so I want to go over as often as I can. And also, he gets really happy when I visit."

"Pffft…you have a doting side too. So cute Roppi-chan."
"Don't call me that." Roppi glared in distaste, "Can we get started already? You haven't told me how we're dealing with Yodogiri Masaru's challenge. It's tonight you know."

"Patience Roppi-chan, I'll get to that in a minute." Izaya drummed his fingers on the table, "I have some interesting news to share with you."

Roppi took a seat across from him, "What is it?"

"I've sent Kida and Saki to Osaka, they were checking on a little theory I had. Turns out I was right on the money. I got confirmation from a few other sources as well. There's no mistake." Izaya slid a manila folder over to him.

Roppi flipped it open, as he went through the contents, his brow furrowed, "Are you kidding me?"

A smirk adorned Izaya's face, "Nope!"

"So this is why that Tsukumoya guy said he's 'technically' in Osaka?"

"Yeah, his sense of humor is worse than mine,"

Roppi sighed, "I don't know if this makes things more complicated, or easier."

"Well we know it's going to be more fun this way riight~? This will definitely be a sore spot for Masaru-kun."

His twin looked at him in exasperation, "Seriously, I'm half convinced you have a death wish. But speaking of him...how are we dealing with that annoying loudmouth tonight?"

"Well, I said we're going to hit Yodogiri where it hurts. And we're going to use Masaru-kun for that. Do you still want to fight him Roppi-chan?"

Roppi perked up and a feral grin took over his face, "Do you have to ask?"

"Good. This is what we're going to do..."

6:25 pm, the streets of Ikebukuro

Mikado knew it wouldn't be too long before his zealous online antics caught up to him.

There was a lot of talk going around on the online forums about the sudden gathering and reformation of the color gangs, and several other groups in Ikebukuro. Fights breaking out, blame thrown around, and pure tension all around. In the past few weeks, there were several members of the Dollars that have been injured, and a handful of them were hospitalized. Some people within the Dollars formed their own sub-groups and started fighting back. They received information of attackers from other members and got revenge on their own.

Things were getting out of hand. Even as the founder, Mikado couldn't lift a finger to do anything about it. At this rate, another huge gang war would break out. He was at wit's end, he didn't know what to do to remedy the situation.

And worse, Mikado was being stalked.

He didn't have to peer over his shoulder, he knew they were there and what they looked like. It was a small group of guys, each wearing one article of green clothing. A color gang.
He didn't know how long it's been going on, but he definitely noticed them now that they've started making their presence known. On some days, a few of them followed him home from school, but never into the residential area, past the police box. Then, they started showing up at the school gates. They even followed him few times when he and Anri showed Aoba around the city. They haven't approached him yet. But the anticipation was killing him.

What do they want? What are they going to do? When are they going to do it?

I can't wait to find out.

Mikado clenched his fist around the strap of his backpack. He willed that voice in the back of his mind away. It wasn't him. It was the stress talking, that's all. The recent events that's been going on lately, it's getting to him. Especially with that offer Aoba sprang him with.

Mikado was startled out of his thoughts when a hand grabbed the scruff of his jacket and dragged him into the nearest alley. He made a surprised gasp at the sudden contact. He hadn't realized they already got within arm's reach before it was too late.

"I hear you're a part of Dollars kid."

Mikado gulped, the grip on his strap was painfully tight now, "I-I don't know what you're talking about."

"Don't lie to us. I saw you at that big gathering a couple months back. You Dollars pricks fucked up a couple of our guys the other day. We're just returning the favour…"

"You've been following him around for a week, and this is how you confront him? A location clearly visible from the street, and a ton of witnesses when you nabbed him. Really? I'm disappointed."

A voice spoke from behind the thugs. Mikado looked past them and saw a familiar face. "Aoba-kun?"

Aoba smiled sweetly. He seemed out of place, flanked by several other boys who looked like they were ready to pick a fight.

Aoba paid Mikado no mind and continued to address the guy who grabbed him, "Nice try, but this wasn't well thought out at all. I hate to say this, but you're not leader material, big guy."

Though he knew Aoba wasn't speaking to him, Mikado still felt that line was somewhat directed at him as well.

Aoba made a motion with his hand and he and the boys accompanying him charged at the gang members.

Amongst the confusion, Aoba grabbed Mikado's hand and ran out of the alley. A guy with a green bandana noticed them and chased them down the street. All of a sudden, a café signboard fell from the sky and crashed in front of him. He turned to see where it came from and saw a group of his in patterned trenchcoats running away from a blonde bartender. With the thug startled and distracted, Mikado and Aoba used that chance to make a break for it.

They slowed down a few blocks away to catch their breath. Mikado looked over at his junior. He was unnerved that the boy was aware of his stalker situation, and was readily available to help, but he kept his concerns to himself.
"Thank you, Aoba-kun. If you weren't there, things would've turned out really bad for me."

Aoba chuckled, "Well, I couldn't let our boss get beat up, now could I?"

Mikado's eyes flicked away, "I didn't agree to anything yet."

"Yet, huh?" Aoba smirked as Mikado tried to stutter out a denial, "Well, in either case, I think merging our groups together would be beneficial don't you think? You can clearly see why after today."

A few days ago Aoba dropped the bomb on him. He was the founder and current leader of the Blue Squares. He knew Mikado was the leader of the Dollars. In light of the increased gang violence in Ikebukuro, Aoba proposed that they form an alliance, and on top of that, Mikado would be the leader of their allied forces.

Mikado knew he was just a pawn in this plan. He was just a founder by name after all. He had no control over the Dollars. Like the incident when Anri was being targeted, or the incident when Izaya was getting chased for that yakuza bounty, and right now, with all the fights breaking out all over the city.

He wasn't strong like Heiwajima Shizuo, or influential like Orihara Izaya, he didn't have fighting skills like Kadota or Kida, nor did he have powers like Celty or Anri. He was a weak, irrelevant boy in a city full of extraordinary people. It hurt. It was a wound that was deep and old and was continuously prodded at the more time he spent with his friends. He felt he wasn't worthy of walking with them. He wasn't worth of shouldering the responsibility of the gang that he himself created.

Wasn't that just lame?

"I think we can help each other out, right senpai? You won't have to worry about an incident like this happening again."

Mikado closed his eyes. Even his junior thought little of him. Well, as long as he was being underestimated, nobody would see the fangs he was hiding. It was a bitter feeling, getting left behind. Even Kida, had changed so much when he came to this city. He wouldn't be able to match up to him, that's why he should just kill that weak part of himself.

That voice, it was getting louder in his head. But why stop it? It was a part of him, regardless of how his weaker part denied it. Wouldn't it be better to let it take control?

"Mikado-senpai? Are you alright?"

"...I'm fine." Mikado smiled. "I've decided, let's work together Aoba-kun."

He held out his hand to shake. Aoba raised his eyebrows in surprise before smiling himself and taking his senior's hand. He didn't say anything about Mikado's unsettling smile or behavior, until the handshake started getting painful.

"Umm..." Aoba struggled against Mikado's grip which was tightening by the second, "M-Mikado-senpai, you're hurting me."

Mikado blinked, surprise overtook his eerie blank smile, "...Ah."

He immediately released his hand, smiling apologetically, though it never reached his eyes. "Sorry about that. Shall we go? We can discuss this further at my place."
Aoba stared after his senior as he walked ahead to the direction of his apartment. He followed after a small hesitation, half reluctant and half curious. There was something dangerous about his aura now. Aoba feared that perhaps he severely misjudged the type of person Mikado was.

9:00 pm, Raira Academy's Second Ground

Roppi stood at the edge of the field, with his arms crossed. It was dark, but the surrounding streetlights in the distance would backlight any figures approaching. He kept a careful watch for any signs of movement.

The night was quiet, and the place was deserted. Most people would be on edge in this situation, but Roppi embraced it. It wasn't often he was assigned to do something out in the open, without a single human around. Admiring the open sky never got old for him. Being born in a lab made one appreciate the limitless and ever changing sky. The stars twinkled playfully, and the almost full moon peaked out from behind the clouds, illuminating the field. Roppi let himself smile at the sight, no one but the moon as a witness. He'd enjoy it before a certain loudmouth monkey came to shatter the serenity of the still night.

Of course, as he thought that, he appeared. Roppi's smile dropped immediately when he spotted a figure, confidently striding across the field towards him.

"Evenin'" Masaru greeted with a cocksure smirk that Roppi wanted to smother on the dirty ground, "Glad you showed up...and empty handed? That's a shame. I hoped we could've worked things out."

Roppi didn't let the irritation he felt cross his face. It would be easy for his temper to be used against him when things went south.

"You have no intention of fighting fair, so I'd rather not risk losing an important asset."

Masaru tried to look shocked, but ruined it with a wicked smirk, "What? Someone as great and just as me wouldn't think of doing something like that!"

Roppi's eyes flicked over the man's shoulder, "I'm not blind. I can see the field is surrounded. Did you bring the Asuki-kai with you?"

A barking laugh, "Weeeell, a little over half of them. They admire me so much that the insisted to tag along and make sure you don't violate my request to come alone. I let them since I didn't say that I'd be coming alone now did I? But relax, they won't be interfering. I'll be doing the honors of killing you tonight" he said with a malicious glint in his eye.

The threat did nothing but bring a smirk to Roppi's lips, "That's my line. You're the one who ordered Satoshi to shoot me right? I've been waiting to get back at you for that."

"Oh, what's this? A confession? Get in line, everyone seems to be confessing to me lately! I'm really popular, huh?"

And his smirk slid right off, "What...? How did that sound like a confession to you?"

"I get I'm handsome, you don't have to rub it in."

"Oy...bastard, are you even listening?" Roppi growled.

"Hmm? Yeah, you said 'Something, something, you're the one for me, something, something, been waiting to get a piece of me. Around those lines, right?"
"…I'm going to enjoy beating you up."

"Eeeh, sorry. I'm not an 'M' type, if you want any luck getting me, you have to deal with me being the 'S'!" He laughed heartedly before he charged at Roppi.

Roppi took a quick step back to avoid his swinging fist. He quickly followed with another, and another in quick succession. Masaru was fast, he had to admit as he was forced to dodge the onslaught of punches. But it wasn't anything he couldn't handle. Roppi tilted his head slightly and let Masaru's fist swished past. He immediately followed with his own fist aimed at his gut. The fist connected with Masaru's other hand that he brought up to intercept the blow.

"Saw that coming did you?" Roppi asked.

Before he had time to reply, Roppi's head smashed into his sending him toppling backwards.

"Too bad you didn't see that one."

Masaru grinned as he fell back. His palms hit the ground and his feet swung up kicking Roppi in the chest. "Mouthy little bitches should learn not to speak so soon."

Roppi coughed as he was also knocked back and hit the ground. He quickly scrambled back to his feet. Masaru watched him with amusement as he slowly got up himself. He could tell Masaru was clearly experienced and had a better fighting form than him, even though his blows were nothing special.

He scoffed as he launched himself at this opponent once more. It didn't matter how much experience he had. Roppi was built to outlast any human in a fight; he'd use that advantage to win.

At the edge of the field, the yakuza members from the Asuki faction watched to two men fighting in the darkened field.

A man shifted as he watched them fight, "Who do you think will win?"

Another answered, "I don't know, they sort of look evenly matched. It doesn't matter. Yodogiri said to move in ten minutes, whether or not there's a winner or they're still fighting."

"Orihara's really unlucky to fight such an underhanded guy" the first man said.

"I don't really mind it actually. I just have to find a way to be even more underhanded, right~?"

The man who last spoke spun around with his gun ready. His face twisted in confusion as he realized that he was pointing his weapon at the man Yodogiri was supposedly fighting on the field.

"Orihara Izaya? How are you here?"

Izaya smirked as he rose his hands mockingly, "I took a cab."

The man clicked his silencer off, "Funny. I don't know what's going on, but you're an idiot for coming to us. You're outnumbered."

Even with his disadvantage, Izaya didn't look phased, "Is that so?"

It was then that he realized that something was incredibly wrong. His comrades were too silent. None of them lifted their own weapons at the surprise guest. At closer inspection, they're eyes were glazed over, and their pupils took on a reddish glow.
"…What did you do…?"

"Just the usual, I simply spread a little love to my beloved humans."

The man saw a movement in his peripheral and felt something sharp plunge into his side. And suddenly an onslaught of whispers cut through the silent night.

Pain burst from the side of his face as Masaru managed to get past his defences and punch his cheek yet again.

Roppi kept his feet planted firmly, unwilling to give his opponent the satisfaction of seeing him stumble. He dealt with worse pain anyway.

Not about to let that hit go unpunished, he drew back his own fist and pistoled it into Masaru's gut. He followed with another harder swing at the same spot before clocking him in the jaw. Masaru coughed and toppled to his knees. Roppi gave him a final kick into his chest, sending the man flat on his back.

The both of them remained as they were, beaten and tired. Their fight was considerably quick, but neither men pulled their punches, leaving the two of them drained. They made no move to attack each other again.

"You're beat." Roppi's hoarse voice announced after a while.

Masaru chuckled through his wheezes, "Ha…I didn't think…you'd be this tough…heh…but that doesn't mean anything. It's my win."

Roppi frowned, "How do you figure that?"

Masaru slowly pushed himself up to sit upright, offering him a bruised smirk. The sound of several feet treading through the grass towards them filled the silence.

"You forget my friends are here."

"You said they wouldn't interfere." Roppi glared.

"They didn't interfere with the fight. Now that it's done, they can do whatever now, right?" Masaru grinned. "Izaya ought to teach his copy a thing or two about loopholes, they can get you killed, you know?"

Roppi's eyes widened, and his mouth went slack at his words. A sick feeling of dread washed over him as Masaru's grin turned giddy.

"Yeah, we knew. Did you really think we wouldn't notice how Orihara Izaya managed to be in two places at once? Or how he suddenly developed fighting skills, when he never bothered to lift his own hands in a fight before? Don't underestimate Yodogiri Jinnai's intelligence gathering, bastard."

The men of Asuki had them surrounded now, and they formed a circle around the two men.

"We'd be interested in your story and all that, but right now, we just want to cut off that guy's resources. So, that just means you're going to die, sorry about that."

He signaled to the men around them. And two shots rang out.

Masaru's eyes bulged and he cried out as he felt pain explode from his right shoulder and left leg.
Still reeling from shock, he dropped his eyes down to his own body and saw two bullet wounds that were bleeding steadily.

"…the..fuck..?"

"Consider that payback." Roppi said smugly.

Masaru looked around wildly, "The fuck are you bastards doing?!"

"They've had a change of 'heart' so to speak," said a voice from behind him. "Not consciously though."

An arm snaked around his shoulder, deliberately putting weight on his injured shoulder. Masaru groaned in pain. "Y-You…what did you do, Izaya-bastard?"

"Oh, nothing special. An acquaintance of mine as a rather creepy ability, maybe you've heard of it? To be able to turn people into her puppets by stabbing them, in turn they can spread her influence by stabbing others."

Masaru blanched as he realized what he was referring to. The cursed demon blade, Saika.

Izaya continued, "Well, I had her stab an Asuki-kai member before this evening, and while you two were fighting, these guys were having a stabbing party in the background. Sounds fun, huh?"

The surrounding men didn't react to a word that was being said. They stood silently at attention, as if waiting for orders, their eyes blank and glowing red. They didn't react when several other footsteps were hurrying towards the group.

Roppi frowned and peered beyond their circle, "It's the Awakusu…I see Yoshiro Ken leading the group."

"You fucker..." Masaru growled. "You lied. I said come alone."

"Hm? You're upset when you also twisted the rules you set?" Izaya laughed, "But to be honest, I'm just as surprised they're here as you are. I did come alone. I guess that's what happens when you announce a secret meeting in front of an Awakusu-kai member. If you didn't want any party crashers, you should be a little more subtle next time."

The Awakusu breached the circle, some perplexed at the state of the Asuki. Izaya was quick to explain a heavily edited version of the events that transpired. Through the confusion, Roppi slipped out of the group before anyone could notice him.

Yoshiro looked over at Masaru and motioned for some of the men to surround him.

The fallen man didn't make a move to try to escape, he was too proud for that.

"Do it." He ground out. "Stop stalling and just kill me. I know when I'm beat."

"Kill you? No no, we won't do that." Izaya smiled the kind of smile that looked reassuring, yet sent unpleasant shivers down your spine. "I was only planning on handing you over to the Awakusu-kai, since they want to play with you first~ Lucky for you, they're already here to pick you up."

Masaru felt two of the yakuza grab him, while someone threw a bag over his head.

That was the last thing he remembered before he was knocked unconscious.
"Yodogiri Jinnai-sama!"

The man sitting comfortably in his couch turned to address the man who suddenly burst into the room. "What is it?"

"Yodogiri Jinnai-sama was taken by the Awakusu-kai! And half of the Asuki-kai have been taken out as well!"

The man nodded and waved him away. "Call the other Yodogiri Jinnais to come here."

He heard his subordinate leave and shut the door behind him. As soon as he did, he slammed both his fists on the coffee table in front of him. His breathing was ragged, and his face was twisted into a scowl. He lifted his shaking hands and looked at them. They were trembling with anger. He clenched them and took a deep breath to compose himself. After a beat of silence, the episode passed. He was calm again.

The door opened, and he heard two sets of footsteps enter.

A woman and a young boy came to stand before him.

He spoke, "Second, Fourth. It looks like Third has failed to kill Orihara Izaya yet again, moreover, he has been captured by the Awakusu-kai."

"Tch, that stupid narcissist!" the boy muttered, "He's really done it this time."

"Geez, he's such a pain, nyan….he shouldn't have tried to take Iza-nyan all by himself" the woman said.

The man was silent. The other two fell silent as well. They could feel him seething.

"Masaru is a fool, but the real pain here is Orihara-kun." He said his name tenderly which confused and alarmed the other two present, "He's been getting in our way for too long, and now he's embarrassed the name of Yodogiri Jinnai. He made it look like outsmarting us is simple. I can't let this slide."

"What should we do?" The boy asked, his voice more serious anyone his age should be capable of.

"The final phase of the plan is to be carried out immediately. We'll cut back on the effort to capture Hijiribe Ruri for now. Recovering Masaru and obtaining the dullahan's head is top priority. Everything else will go as planned. The Asuki faction would be even keener on stealing Awakusu's weapon now, which makes things easier. As for Orihara-kun…I have something special planned for him."

The other two looked at each other wordlessly. They could already tell that their rival informant had a horrific, and fast approaching end coming his way.

"Orihara-kun…I'll take the head he's hiding, and the one between his shoulders too."

After all the commotion at Raira's second ground was done, Izaya said his goodbyes to the yazuka members and left the scene.

He walked for several minutes, changing his direction ever so often to make sure he wasn't being
tailed. When he was satisfied, he headed towards his intended destination. He and Roppi had
decided on a random location beforehand where they would meet after the fight. He sent him a quick
text telling him he was en route to the designated spot.

The response was quick:

Roppi-chan: [Coming. I was making sure I wasn't followed so I'm a little ways off. Be there in 15.]

Izaya smirked proudly. His Roppi-chan was learning so quickly, doing exactly as he did in their
situation without instruction. He happily skipped the rest of the way.

It wasn't long before he reached the location, a non-descript road lined with a few residential
buildings, deserted at this hour as he anticipated. He was predictably the first to arrive.

Izaya sighed and he slipped his hands in his pockets as he thought back to the events earlier. They
won. Their first battle against Yodogiri Jinnai and they beat him. Sure, it was against Yodogiri
Masaru, a rash and easy to predict opponent, but this gave them momentum. They were the ones to
strike first, and it would give them the upper hand. It was good that he managed convince Niekawa
Haruna to lend a hand with her pseudo-Saika. That made things considerably easier. The informant
didn't doubt that Roppi could've taken them without her help, but Izaya didn't relish the idea of him
taking more damage than necessary.

Either way, they did it.

It didn't escape him that he started thinking differently now. Thinking things like 'their win', instead
of 'my win', 'we' instead of 'me', and 'us' instead of 'I'. Why was that? He was a lone observer who
watched humans, and never needed to include himself with others. Then why was it okay for him to
think of himself as part of a unit like this? I didn't scare him like the thought it would. It was actually
kind of nice.

His lips curled. So this is the camaraderie that several of his lovely humans constantly sought out.
Izaya wandered over to a row of vending machines nearby.

"Maybe I should buy him a soda for a job well done? Uwah, I'm starting to sound lame."

"Flea…?"

Izaya stiffened, and turned to see the one person who called him by that nickname. Shizuo wasn't
wearing his usual bartender suit. Instead, he donned a white t-shirt, blue sweats and sandals. His
sudden appearance and getup greatly confused Izaya and the blonde looked equally as baffled.

"Shizu-chan? What are you doing here?" Izaya asked as he quickly typed a message to Roppi behind
his back, warning him not to come there.

"I live near here. Came to buy cigarettes," Shizuo answered, pointing to a vending machine behind
Izaya, "Why are you here?"

He lived nearby, of course he would. Leave it to Izaya to choose this location of all places as a
meeting spot. Izaya purposely didn't keep close tabs on where Shizuo worked or lived for the sole
reason that others wouldn't notice how preoccupied he was with the brute. But it was times like this
when he realized how stupid that was in the first place.

"I…happened to be in the area" he answered.

Shizuo hummed as he went to the tobacco vending machine. He put in a few coins and selected a
brand. "Don't tell me your shady crowd lives around here" he said as he bent to pick up his cigarettes.

Izaya was definitely not admiring how snug his sweats were. "No, there was a little small scale 'operation' nearby. We caught a guy working for that rival informant."

Shizuo's eyes shifted to his, "Is it that same guy your…alter ego told me about the other day, uh, what's his name?"

"Yodogiri Jinnai. Yes, it that same guy." Izaya said, "I'm surprised you remember."

"I promised you I'd help you, didn't I? I was serious about that." Shizuo shoved the pack of cigarettes in his pocket and faced him fully. "You can let me know the next time you plan on taking him on. I'll lend a hand, or something. Or if he tries attacking you again, I'll beat him up."

Izaya stared at him, then burst out laughing, "Hahahaha! What the heck is that? Since when were you so eager to back me up?"

Shizuo clicked his teeth in annoyance, "Since I said I would. I'm a man of my word."

"Such a gentleman. Fine, I'll be sure to tell you the next time Yodogiri tries anything." Izaya smirked. His smile dropped immediately as he spotted Roppi turn the corner over Shizuo's shoulder. His twin froze as soon as he spotted who was with Izaya.

'That idiot! Didn't he get my message?'

"You better. Good night, flea." Shizuo said as he turned to leave.

In panic, Izaya grabbed his face and pulled it back. Shizuo stumbled towards him. The raven pulled him down and sealed his lips over his. It wasn't his best plan, but he needed to distract the thick-headed blonde long enough for Roppi to make a break for it.

Izaya opened one eye to peer over Shizuo's shoulder to see if his twin had fled yet.
He hadn't. He stood there looking at the two of them in shock, his eyes brimming in confusion and another unidentifiable emotion. Izaya had no time to worry about his expression. He wrapped his arms around the tall blonde's neck, to make subtle yet jerky motions for him to get away, along with a meaningful glare.

Roppi flinched as if coming out of a trance. Suddenly realizing Izaya was giving him a chance to escape without being noticed, he nodded shakily and left the scene quickly.

After he was sure the other was out of sight, he pulled away from Shizuo who looked perplexed at what just happened.

"Haha, Shizu-chan harassment: done for the day~! Couldn't let you get away without annoying you at least once!"
Shizuo didn't seem to hear him, he only stared down at the informant with a focused gaze.

"What an interesting and yet boring reaction. It was a joke Shizu-chan, a joke!"

Still not a word from Ikebukuro's strongest.

"Really now, I'll start to feel a little hurt if you-mmph!?”

Without a warning Shizuo grabbed Izaya's shoulders and smashed their lips back together.

Izaya gasped against his mouth and felt blush burn his cheeks and ears.

_Shizu was kissing him._

_Wait?_

_Why?_

He could barely make sense of the situation he found himself in. But his brain promptly shuts off as he felt the taller man lightly nibble on his lip. Izaya moaned softly and clung on to the thin material on Shizuo's back. He growled in response, deepening the kiss, and Izaya felt the vibrations resonate through his body.

The two of them pulled apart to get some much needed air.

Slightly dazed and panting, Izaya said "Shizu…chan…what are you-?”

"I'm harassing you back" he muttered before he captured his mouth once more.

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